

The Self-Care Wheel

A Check In With Yourself

A self-care check-in is not a test of how well you are looking after yourself. It is an opportunity to stop, look around your life and notice what is supporting you, what has become depleted and what may need more attention.

The Self-Care Wheel divides wellbeing into connected areas. Looking at them separately can make an overwhelming feeling such as 'everything is too much' more understandable. You may discover that several areas are reasonably steady while one or two have quietly become difficult.

The aim is not to create a perfectly round wheel. The aim is to notice yourself before your needs become impossible to ignore.

How to use the wheel

Read through each area and give it a score from 0 to 10. A low score does not mean failure; it simply tells you that this area may need attention, support or adaptation. A high score is worth noticing too because it shows what is already helping.

- 0-2: very depleted or difficult.
- 3-4: needs attention.
- 5-6: some support, but could be stronger.
- 7-8: generally supporting me well.
- 9-10: currently strong and sustainable.

Score according to how life actually feels now, not how you think it should look.

1. Rest and sleep

Consider sleep quality, opportunity for sleep, downtime and recovery between demands. Rest also includes quiet, sensory breaks, unstructured time and periods when you are not responsible for producing or performing.

Rest & sleep check

My score: ____ / 10 What is working? _____

What is making rest difficult? _____ One small change: _____

2. Physical health

Physical self-care includes movement, pain management, medical appointments, medication, mobility, illness recovery and noticing new symptoms. It is not about forcing exercise when your body needs rest. New, severe or persistent symptoms deserve appropriate medical assessment.

3. Nutrition and hydration

Food and fluids support energy, cognition and physical functioning, but eating can be affected by sensory needs, eating disorders, allergies, intolerances, medication, finances, disability and executive functioning. Ask whether your current pattern is meeting your needs as realistically as possible and whether extra support is needed.

4. Emotional wellbeing

Emotional self-care includes recognising feelings, expressing them safely, allowing difficult emotions and having strategies that help you regulate. You do not need to be calm all the time to be emotionally well.

- Can I name what I am feeling?
- Do I have somewhere safe to express difficult emotions?
- Am I more irritable, numb, tearful or overwhelmed?
- Am I expecting myself to cope without support?

5. Relationships and connection

Connection may come from partners, friends, family, colleagues, community, pets, groups or professional relationships. The important question is not how many relationships you have but whether there is enough safety, reciprocity, belonging and honesty. Sometimes self-care means more connection; at other times it means reducing social demands and protecting time alone.

6. Boundaries and self-respect

Boundaries protect time, energy, safety and dignity. Notice whether you are agreeing to things you do not have capacity for, apologising excessively, allowing work into recovery time or tolerating behaviour that leaves you distressed. Self-respect also includes the way you speak to yourself.

Boundary check

Something I need to say no to: _____ Something I need more of: _____

A limit I need to communicate: _____

7. Work, study and purpose

Work and study can provide structure, meaning, achievement and connection, but can also create overload. Purpose is broader than employment and may come from caring, creativity, learning, volunteering, spirituality or values. Ask whether responsibilities are sustainable and whether you have meaning outside productivity.

8. Finances and practical life

Money, housing, transport, paperwork, appointments, household responsibilities and caring duties all affect wellbeing. Practical stress can keep the nervous system under continual pressure. Asking for benefits advice, automating a payment, sharing a task, requesting a workplace adjustment or getting help with administration can all be forms of self-care.

9. Environment and space

Noise, lighting, temperature, clutter, smells, interruptions and lack of privacy can drain capacity. For people with sensory sensitivities or neurodivergent needs, environmental fit may be particularly important. Consider headphones, softer lighting, comfortable clothing, fewer notifications, predictable routines, a quieter workspace or a calmer corner.

10. Personal growth

Growth is not a demand to constantly improve. It can mean learning about yourself, developing a skill, changing a pattern, exploring identity or becoming more accepting of your needs. Sometimes growth is active; sometimes it is allowing yourself to stop striving.

11. Enjoyment and pleasure

Pleasure is easy to remove when life becomes busy. Hobbies, laughter, music, creativity, nature, games, reading, making things, movement or quiet rituals may seem optional, yet they can be important sources of restoration and identity. You are allowed to do something because you enjoy it.

Your whole wheel

My scores

Rest/sleep ____ Physical health ____ Nutrition/hydration ____ Emotional wellbeing ____

Relationships ____ Boundaries ____ Work/purpose ____ Finances/practical life ____

Environment/space ____ Personal growth ____ Enjoyment/pleasure ____

Look at the pattern rather than focusing only on the lowest score. Is poor sleep affecting emotional wellbeing? Is work reducing time for relationships? Are finances creating worry? Is sensory overload leaving little capacity for enjoyment?

What is the wheel telling you?

An uneven wheel does not mean your life is broken. Life naturally moves through seasons. During illness, physical health may require more attention; during bereavement, emotional capacity may be low; when caring for someone, personal time may temporarily reduce. Ask whether the current pattern is temporary and supported, or whether it has become a long-term way of living that is steadily depleting you.

A personal reflection

"When I first did a self-care wheel, I expected all my scores to be low because I felt exhausted. They were not. I had good relationships and a sense of purpose, but almost no rest, very little enjoyment and weak boundaries around work. Seeing it visually helped me understand that I did not need to fix my whole life. I needed to protect the areas that were being squeezed out." - illustrative personal reflection

Choose one area, not eleven

Trying to improve every section at once turns self-care into another project. Choose one area where a small change feels possible and make the action specific: finish work 30 minutes earlier, take lunch away from your desk, text a friend or book the appointment.

My one-area plan

Area: _____ Why it matters: _____
Smallest action: _____ When: _____ What could make it easier: _____

Check in again, don't grade yourself

Repeat the wheel after a week, month or significant change. The purpose is not to achieve a better score; it is to notice movement and understand what influenced it. Sleep may improve because of a work boundary, emotional wellbeing may dip during an anniversary, or connection may improve because you asked for help.

The minimum wheel for a difficult day

- BODY - Have I eaten, drunk, rested and responded to basic physical needs?
- MIND - What is taking up the most mental or emotional space?
- PEOPLE - Do I need connection, support, reassurance, boundaries or quiet?
- PRACTICAL - What genuinely needs doing today, and what can wait?

Self-care and guilt

A check-in can reveal needs you have been avoiding because meeting them feels selfish. You may need rest but fear disappointing someone, need a boundary but fear conflict, or need help but believe you should manage alone. Try replacing 'Am I allowed to need this?' with 'What happens if this need continues to be ignored?'

When the wheel identifies something bigger

Sometimes a self-care check-in highlights difficulties that cannot be solved by self-care alone: unsafe relationships, unmanageable debt, discrimination, unsuitable work, significant physical symptoms, persistent depression, severe anxiety, trauma, eating difficulties or substance misuse. The next action may be professional, medical, practical or safeguarding support.

When to seek support

Speak with a GP or qualified professional when mental or physical health difficulties are persistent, worsening or affecting daily functioning. Support may include therapy, medical care, dietetic support, occupational therapy, workplace adjustments, financial advice or safeguarding services depending on the issue.

If you cannot keep yourself safe, are thinking about suicide or self-harm, or there is an immediate life-threatening emergency, call 999 or go to A&E.; In England, NHS 111 can direct people to urgent mental health support. Samaritans offers emotional support on 116 123.

A seven-day wheel check-in

- Day 1 - Score the wheel without trying to change anything.
- Day 2 - Notice two areas that seem most connected.
- Day 3 - Appreciate one strong area and what makes it work.
- Day 4 - Choose one depleted area and identify what it needs.
- Day 5 - Make the smallest useful change.
- Day 6 - Observe whether anything else shifts.
- Day 7 - Decide what to continue, adapt or ask for help with.

Books and further exploration

- *Why Has Nobody Told Me This Before?* - Dr Julie Smith.
- *Burnout* - Emily Nagoski and Amelia Nagoski.
- *The Compassionate Mind* - Paul Gilbert.
- *Rest Is Resistance* - Tricia Hersey.

Clinical and source notes

This resource is informed by general whole-person wellbeing principles reflected in NHS public guidance on mental wellbeing, sleep, physical activity, nutrition, stress and accessing mental health support; NHS Every Mind Matters self-care material; and Mind wellbeing information. The Self-Care Wheel is a reflective educational tool, not a validated diagnostic or clinical assessment.

Scores are subjective and should be used for personal reflection rather than diagnosis. Disability, neurodivergence, illness, pregnancy, medication, eating disorders, trauma, finances, culture and caring responsibilities can affect what self-care looks like and what is realistic.

A check in with yourself

The most valuable part of the wheel is not the number you write beside each area. It is the moment you stop long enough to notice yourself. What has been going well? What is costing too much? What have you been ignoring? What do you miss? Where are you carrying more than you need to carry alone?

You do not need to fix the whole wheel. Notice where you are, choose one supportive step and check in with yourself again.

Questions that can deepen the check-in

- Which area has changed most over the last month?
- Which area am I protecting well, and what helps me do that?
- Where am I relying on willpower when I actually need practical support?
- Which need do I repeatedly minimise because other people seem to need more?
- What am I doing because it genuinely supports me, and what am I doing because I think I should?
- If nothing changed for the next three months, which part of the wheel would concern me most?

Notice strengths as well as gaps

Self-reflection can easily become a search for problems. Deliberately notice the sections of your wheel that are working. A supportive relationship, a reliable bedtime routine, a nourishing meal you can manage, a meaningful role, a quiet corner or a boundary you have learned to hold are all resources.

Ask what makes a stronger area work. Is it predictability, another person's support, a routine, an adjustment, enough time, reduced sensory demand or permission to do things differently? Those ingredients may be transferable to another part of the wheel.

What is already holding me up?

A strong part of my wheel: _____

What makes it work: _____

Could any of that support another area? _____

A monthly wheel review

The wheel can be repeated monthly or at times of change. Keep the old scores if that feels useful, but avoid turning them into targets. The value is in noticing patterns: what improves when work is quieter, what deteriorates when sleep changes, what helps during difficult anniversaries, and what tends to disappear first when you are overloaded.

This month

Something that supported me: _____

Something that drained me: _____

An area that improved: _____

An area needing more care: _____

One adjustment for next month: _____

When your scores keep dropping

If several areas remain low despite your efforts, the answer may not be 'try harder at self-care'. Your circumstances may need to change, or you may need more support. Workload, illness, caring demands, financial hardship, relationship difficulties, discrimination, trauma and inaccessible environments cannot always be solved through individual coping strategies.

This is an important distinction: self-care includes recognising when the problem is bigger than your personal capacity to manage alone.