



## Give Yourself a Self-Care Boost

**“Love yourself first and everything else falls into line. You really have to love yourself to get anything done in this world.”**

**Lucille Ball**

The Tokyo Olympic Games were not just another Olympics. They are historical for many unique events, one being that while they took place in 2021, they are referred to as the 2020 Olympics or the “Pandemic Olympics”, with empty stadiums and athletes hiding behind masks. Most notably, the games were delayed a year due to the Covid19 pandemic. Yet, one of the more memorable Olympic events had nothing to do with the pandemic, but was powerful in light of the pandemic and health and wellness. Meet Simone Biles.

Simone Biles is an awe-inspiring, twenty-four years-old, American gymnast. In World Championships and the Rio Olympics, we witnessed Simone’s greatness. She defies the law of physics by soaring through the air with record breaking signature moves, that include jaw-dropping height coupled with twists, backflips, somersaults and nail-biting dismounts. This petite gymnast is nothing short of a showstopper and now will be remembered with an added layer of respect and force to be reckoned with. Simone brought to the table a conversation on mental health after withdrawing from the team competitions to attend to her mental health. Her courage to prioritize her own health during one of the biggest sport events for any athlete and spectator, makes her well-earned bronze medal in Tokyo more meaningful than we could imagine. Self-care first.

Self-care is caring for yourself. It is the activities and/or techniques we engage in to keep our whole-self healthy. It is knowing when to say no and speaking out when your voice needs to be heard. It is pushing the reset button. The importance of self-care may sound like common sense, but unfortunately, it often gets pushed to the bottom of our to-do list.

To explain the importance of self-care, we need to address the often talked about word “stress.” Stress is the perception of a real or imagined threat and the perception that our coping skills are inadequate. Our bodies react to this perceived threat and this is called the stress response, or the “fight or flight response.” When the stress response is triggered, our heart rate and breathing rate may increase, palms may sweat and blood pressure may rise.

Stress affects us all in different ways. Not all stress is bad but chronic stress can have ill consequences and exacerbate medical conditions, including hypertension and heart disease. Having this stress response kick in for a real threat, like a tiger chasing us, exists by design to protect us. But what happens when we are constantly triggering this stress response through unnecessary worry or over-reacting in traffic? The frequent emotional imbalances can get us sick or worsen our medical symptoms unless we intervene. This is where self-care steps in. For good health and longevity, self-care cannot be the first thing to go during difficult times in life or an afterthought. Gaining awareness of our stress symptoms and practicing self-care techniques is the best way to prevent the negative health consequences that accompany chronic stress.

A sound self-care routine can help us cope better and refuel us, particularly in the face of adversity. Seventeen months ago, the world was forced to partake in stringent and unfamiliar self-care measures. With no fair warning, we had to protect ourselves and our family from a virus that to date just won't let up. We had to wear gloves and masks, wash our hands and apply hand sanitizer repeatedly throughout the day. Many had groceries delivered and washed the groceries upon arrival. We practiced social distancing and underwent covid testing, as needed. We created our safe Covid bubbles. For the most part, we demonstrated a great ability to take care of ourselves in the most abnormal and challenging of times. From every corner of the globe, self-care became something to pay attention to but the question is can we maintain this amount of diligence to self-care when not mandated? Can we practice self-care daily to prevent rather than to fix?

Through Simone Biles courageous decision in the Tokyo Olympics we are reminded that it is OK to prioritize our health and well-being. There are many opportunities for self-care and they all have the ability to improve our quality of life. Self-care does not have to cost us anything, and can take a minimal amount of time. For example, only five minutes of focused breathing has the ability to decrease the arousal of our nervous system almost immediately. The key to any self-care plan is repetition and consistency. To get you started, we have put together options for you to create your own toolkit. Pull from this list what feels right for you and add your own techniques as you move forward designing your self-care plan.

## 1. Breathing Meditations and Yoga

Our breath is automatic and accessible 24/7. Using the breath skillfully is one of the easiest and quickest ways to elicit relaxation. A few moments of counting down the exhales using any number that you are comfortable with can quiet a racing mind. Combine breathwork with yoga for an endorphin boost. MIIA members can participate in free live online yoga and meditation classes by visiting the [ompractice.com](https://ompractice.com).

## 2. Exercise

According to the CDC, "Regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do for your health... everyone can experience the health benefits of physical activity." Participate in our fitness videos by visiting [MIIA Winners](#).

## 3. Nature

Spending time outside in nature offers us exercise, natural vitamin D, weight management, social connection and it just feels good.

## 4. Healthy Sleep Schedule

Maintaining a healthy sleep schedule is key to living a healthy lifestyle and feeling alert and energized. Sleep shortages affect our mood and behaviors, leaving us feeling stressed, irritable and mentally drained. According to the CDC, getting seven to nine hours of sleep per night for adults is optimal.

## 5. Diet

Living a healthy lifestyle, which includes maintaining a balanced diet, is key to longevity and feeling good overall. MIIA has health coaches and food recipes awaiting your attention. For more information visit <https://www.emiia.org/well-aware/nutrition-weight-management>.

## 6. Social Connections

Healthy relationships and strong social connections are good for us and make us happier. According to Harvard affiliated Psychiatrist Robert Waldinger, "Good, close relationships seem to buffer us from the problems of getting old." Stay socially connected!

## 7. Essential Oils

There are many therapeutic benefits of essential oils, which range from soothing coughs and sinus congestion (eucalyptus), to relieving stress and promoting sleep (lavender). Essential oils hold the life of the plant. No two oils are alike and should be used judiciously. Essential oils are low risk and low cost.

## 8. Massage

Massage can be a powerful tool to managing stress and relaxing the mind and body. This is done through applying light or deep pressure on the muscles, ligaments and tendons of one's body. There are a host of different types of massage depending on one's needs and any medical conditions and/or injuries one may have. Discuss options with your doctor in advance of your appointment.

**“Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.”**

Anne Lamott