

## EFFECTIVE SELF-CARE DURING DISASTER AND RECOVERY

### QUICK FACTS

Self-care is an important part of supporting recovery from trauma. It helps to take time for yourself, make healthy lifestyle choices and keep up community connections.

During and after a disaster, it's important to treat yourself with kindness. Research shows that being compassionate towards ourselves and others helps build our confidence, increases resilience and promotes good mental health.<sup>1</sup>

You may be trying to cope with a whole range of feelings. Even on good days, practicing self-care can build you up for [the times when it's not so easy](#). Your feelings are valid. Acknowledge that you've been through an extraordinary time and it's normal to have hard moments as you recover.

### USING OUR BREATHING TO GROUND US

When we're feeling distressed, we tend to take shallow breaths that make us light-headed and tense. It seems superficial, but slow, deliberate breathing can really make a difference to our overall wellbeing.

- Find a quiet space with no interruptions.
- Try to relax your body. Drop your shoulders, loosen your limbs. Close your eyes.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose for 3-4 seconds. Notice the sensation of breathing in.
- Let the breath out for 4-5 seconds. Notice how it feels to let it out.
- Keeping going. Breathe in, breathe out. Repeat for 10 minutes.

If you like the way it feels and want to take the next step, [mindfulness](#) will help you to focus on the present and bring you fully into your body.

### STAY IN TOUCH

Being with people we care about is good for our mental health. It gives us more energy, helps us relax and can even help us live longer. During disaster recovery, your community might

feel more important than ever. There may be a need to reach out to support others and find support yourself.

- **Make time to check in with friends and family**

You might even set a reminder in your phone, so it doesn't get missed.

- **Find ways to connect outside of home**

Local communities foster amazing connection after a disaster. Keep an eye out for opportunities from sporting clubs, faith-based organisations and interest groups. You might not feel up for a big activity, but even joining a local social media group is a good start.

- **Spend time with your pet**

Our furry, feathered and scaly friends can help lower stress levels and ease feelings of anxiety and depression.

- **Avoid 'doomscrolling'**

In the short-term, take respite from news and social media that's causing distress. Balance it with creative works, uplifting stories and necessary facts.

- **Connect with others who understand**

Engaging with empathetic people is an amazing tool for mental health. If you're feeling like no one else gets it, you might find comfort on the [SANE Forums](#).

- **Take time out, if you need to**

It's normal to feel overwhelmed right now, and it's okay to step back when you need to recover. Just make sure you check in again afterwards.

## **MAKE PRACTICAL CHANGES TO YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE**

Self-care can cover big and small techniques. Sometimes you might need serious time out to meditate and reflect, while other times might call for a soothing massage.

There are all sorts of practical tips you can introduce into your routine.

- [Choose a well-balanced and nutritious diet](#). Caffeine and alcohol can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and depression<sup>2</sup>, so it may help to cut back for now.
- Get outdoors! Sunshine and movement are good for your mind and body.
- Consider a self-care journal. Every day, jot down how you're feeling. Keeping a record makes it easier to reflect on good days.
- Reflect on the positives. What inspires you? What are three things that make the world a better place?
- Make lists and reminders of what helps – it can be tricky to remember in tough times.
- Try to get into [a good sleep routine](#) – avoid using devices in bed, relax with a book or calming soundtrack, and get under the covers at the same time every day if you can
- [Make slow, small changes towards a healthy lifestyle](#). It's okay if you feel like you can't make major changes right now. Every bit helps.

## **MAKE A COMMITMENT TO SELF-CARE**

Even when we know what helps, it can be hard to stick to it. Having a routine helps for many reasons. Knowing what to expect reduces stress. Predictability is calming. Trauma can make it hard to look ahead and focus.

Self-care doesn't always go to plan, but when we're clear about what to do, it's easier to adapt. We recommend:

- Keeping your routine simple.
- Including time for respite and healing.
- Planning to adapt if the routine changes.
- Committing to doing at least one thing every day to care for yourself.

## **CHECK OUT TOOLS AND APPS THAT MIGHT HELP**

We've put together [a helpful selection of apps](#) for managing your personal health, time, finances, food and more.

## **FINDING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT**

If you're concerned about how you're feeling, speak to your existing mental health professional, or contact [SANE's free counselling support](#) on [1800 18 7263](#) for information, advice and referral. You can also connect with others who have been through similar experiences and understand what you're going through via our [online, moderated, anonymous forums](#).

## **REFERENCES**

1. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/209332>
2. e.g. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4668773/>
3. Also <https://www.bmj.com/content/358/bmj.j4163>