

20 Micro (Yet Mighty) Self-Care Challenges That'll Make Any Day Better



While having audacious goals can be an effective way to keep pushing toward your future, it's just as important to find small ways to take care of yourself every day. For busy professionals, and parents who juggle work and life responsibilities daily, self-care rituals are often under-prioritized. Not only because we run out of time, but because some of them sound a tad too intimidating: Cut out sugar completely? Meditate for 30 minutes every day? Go to bed at a disciplined 10 p.m. when we just discovered *Bridgerton*? These kinds of aspirations can seem truly impossible to start, let alone maintain forever. Rather than putting too much pressure on yourself, consider taking on more bite-size, micro-challenges this year to foster wellness in every aspect of your life. We asked experts in a variety of fields—mindfulness, mental health, nutrition, business, and more—to recommend their favorite manageable, yet meaningful mini-goals for everyday wellness.

Take a walk—without your phone.

“For so many of us, it can be difficult to disconnect, and we’ll listen to podcasts or talk on the phone during walk time. This year, try to leave the phone at home as much as you can and notice how much more grounding and magical it can be to go [outside]. You’ll begin to notice the small stuff, like leaves changing or frost on the ground, and the fresh air alone can do wonders on your mental health.”

—Katina Mountanos, mindset coach and author of *On Adulthood: How Millennials (And Any Human, Really) Can Work Less, Live More and Bend the Rules for Good*

Reflect on your day while brushing your teeth.

“At the end of the day, check in with yourself about the highs and lows of your day. We’re often so busy with the hustle and bustle of day-to-day life, we forget to appreciate our accomplishments. Daily reflection can help boost self-

confidence and keep you on track to achieve your goals. After an exhausting day, the last thing you want is to complete another tedious task. So, keep it simple: [Reflect] while you're brushing your teeth." —Kara Kash, RD, LDN, registered dietitian for Factor

Stretch for 10 minutes in the morning.

"Rather than focusing on working out to lose weight, think about taking care of your body. Begin by noticing areas of tension and be gentle with yourself. Take a nurturing approach during this quiet morning time to stretch before you start your day. This peaceful beginning can set the tone for the entire day. Create a 10-minute playlist to help you stay motivated during your stretch session." —Hanna Stensby, licensed marriage and family therapist

Schedule time for creativity.

"With so few adults living up to their creative potential, and the increasingly high number of us experiencing burnout and anxiety, it's critical to block out calendar time for creating. Any sort of creative leisure just a few times a week

can help you build stress-reducing habits and ultimately lead to a more fulfilled life." —Mountanos

Go tech-free first thing in the morning.

"A healthy morning routine is critical for setting your day up for success, so I definitely recommend challenging yourself to eliminate tech from your first minutes. In order to do this, keep your phone out of the bedroom. This might be challenging for some—go easy on yourself and keep trying! Plan a brief morning routine that's just for you, and remember that everything on your phone will still be there when you decide to pick it up more consciously. Invest in a simple digital or analog clock for your nightstand to wake you up in the morning and make your bedroom a sanctuary for rest and sleep." —Tara Stiles, global yoga expert and author of *Clean Mind, Clean Body: A 28 Day Plan for Physical, Mental and Spiritual Self-Care*

Try 4-4-4 breathing.

"Deep breathing techniques have been a crucial component of healing practices throughout the world for thousands of years. Western researchers have also delved into the health benefits of breathing and found that breathing exercises can decrease stress and improve mood. Deep breathing also helps to send oxygen throughout your body for improved physical well-being. Try this very simple breathing

exercise to help manage stress and overall well-being. Breathe in for four counts, hold the breath for four counts, and exhale for four counts. Repeat this exercise for up to five minutes. Notice how you feel once you're finished. You'll likely feel calmer, focused, and energized after even a brief breathing exercise." —[Serena Poon](#), chef, nutritionist, and founder of the method of Culinary Alchemy

Eat more slowly and mindfully.

"Mindful eating involves taking time to consume your meal, eliminating distractions, and paying attention to the delicious food. Practicing mindful eating can help to reduce stress as well as improve your relationship with food. Start by identifying one meal that would be easiest for you to implement mindfulness strategies. Set a timer for 15 to 20 minutes, then put your phone aside and focus on enjoying your meal. It can feel a bit awkward at first, but once you nail the habit, it can become a relaxing and meditative experience." —Kara Kash

Read 10 pages of a book each day.

"Reading is ultimately a form of mindfulness. When we read [a real book], it requires our full attention and forces us to

be present. Reading is also an incredible opportunity to build our learning. Perhaps you want to go back and forth between a fiction and non-fiction book. You'll see your confidence and curiosity expand as you set aside a short amount of time to read per day." —Lauren Cook, therapist, speaker, and author

Have a weekly date—with yourself.

"Part of effective self-care is feeling like we're in control of our time and lives, so setting aside time for yourself is important. We can feel depleted, resentful, and rushed when we're constantly meeting others' needs. Making some time each week, even if it's just one hour, to have a date with yourself, and to do exactly what you want to do, is a great tool. Maybe it's relaxing with a book, going for a walk, catching up with friends, or [treating] yourself to a bite to eat—whatever the activity and your resources, the focus needs to be on doing something you want to do." —Briony Leo, psychologist and head coach at Relish

Get 10 minutes of sunshine in the morning.

"Our circadian rhythm is controlled by the sun and impacts

all of our hormones, and therefore, our mood, energy levels, productivity, and so on. When the sun rises, it signals for our cortisol to rise as well and start our day. In today's world, our sun exposure is limited compared to back in the day. I suggest heading outside for the first 10 minutes of your day and bring your coffee, notebook, or meditation with you." —Jenny Blake, nutritionist

Write down five positive phrases to say to yourself.

"Most of us have habitual negative things we say to ourselves when we mess something up: 'You're so stupid!' or 'What's wrong with you?' To be our own best friends, we want to say loving, positive things to ourselves, but those are really hard to think of on the spot. So develop a list of five positive things you can say to yourself when you'd typically beat yourself up. Then set the alarm or appointment on your phone at least three times each day, and in the alarm's or event's description, write your positive self-talk. Rehearse saying these things to yourself when the reminder goes off, so your new, loving self-talk is top of mind when the stuff is hitting the fan." —Peter Alessandria, photographer, speaker, and author of *Be Bigger Than You Think You Are!*

Give 20-second hugs (when you can).

“Giving and receiving a hug activates sensory nerves that stimulate chemical signals associated with social bonding and pleasure. Hugging boosts oxytocin, supports a healthy immune system, stimulates dopamine production—your ‘chill out’ hormone — and boosts self-esteem. Researchers suggest that it may not be how many hugs you give a day, but [rather] the length of a hug that has a more significant impact. A hug that lasts 20 seconds or more is the best for your mood.” —Josh Axe, DC, DNM, author and founder of Ancient Nutrition

Spend just five minutes a day tidying your home.

“An organized house represents an organized life and brain. Instead of waiting until you can't take it anymore—which is usually at an inconvenient time—include tidying up as part of your morning routine. Take five minutes to put items back in their place, put away the dishes, and do a quick wipe down of the counters. It's also an early win in your day when you feel accomplished; it gives you the confidence to more easily tackle your next task.” —Jenny Blake

Create a designated at-home work space.

“Many of us are working from home, and home work is a needed practice. Having a home office is not only a need for

work productivity, but wellness and balance, too. By adding a dedicated space in 2021, people can find work-life balance while working remotely, and this can lead to optimal wellness achievements and improvements." —Sarah Brandow, chief nutritionist at VitaBowl

Laugh every single day.

"Incorporating humor and laughter into your life can help lighten your mood and provide a temporary break from life's stresses and upsets. Laughter can actually trigger the release of the brain chemical serotonin, which, in turn, decreases depression. Laughter and humor don't just make you feel better emotionally, but they can help you breathe more fully and help your heart function better with more oxygenated blood pumping through the body. Laughter can shield the blood vessels and heart muscles from cardiovascular disease by having an anti-inflammatory effect. Make the conscious choice to bring that levity into your life for at least 10 minutes per day through a humorous podcast, comedians, sitcoms, jokes, and so on, to make you feel better physically and emotionally." —Yvonne Thomas, PhD, psychologist

Try to meal plan once a week.

“Take a half-hour to map out your recipes and grocery store list while organizing your fridge. This will help you eat more healthfully during the week so you don't need last-minute deliveries, saving you both money and [unhealthy choices]. When we're crunched for time, we often turn to the quickest and most convenient foods, even though they're not nutrient-dense and ultimately make us feel more tired and sluggish. By planning ahead with your meal plans, you'll notice you feel more refreshed during the week and more in control of your schedule and diet. This also frees up space in your brain to focus on work, relationships, and other things that matter to you.” —Lauren Cook

Give something back.

“We just went through the gift-giving season, but if it makes you feel good, why stop? Science actually shows that helping others helps *your* mood. It doesn't have to be by giving a present; think of reaching out to someone you know would appreciate it, pick up some shopping for a neighbor, or do something small to help your community, like donating some tins to a food bank. Not only will you brighten someone else's day, but you'll brighten your own too.” —Nicola Elliott, founder of NEOM Organics

Focus on adding good habits, not kicking every bad one.

“When people enter a new year, they immediately start thinking about all the bad habits they have and how to get rid of them. Doing this isn’t realistic, and you’ll be setting yourself up for failure. Instead, try to add one new healthy habit to counteract that unhealthy habit you just can’t seem to let go of. For example, let’s say you can’t seem to stop drinking soda. For every can you drink, drink one to two glasses of water. Before you know it, you might surprise yourself with how good that healthy habit makes you feel, and you’ll ditch that bad habit for good.” —Samia Gore, founder and CEO of Body Complete Rx

Commit to making your bed.

“There is something about making your bed that starts your day off right. When you commit to doing something each day, you get into a routine that can help you be successful. Plus, a made bed just looks nice and feels better when you jump into it at night. My tip is to do it as soon as you get out of bed. It’s a great way to focus on that task at hand each morning before being distracted. If someone else is still sleeping — politely wait for them to awaken and then make it soon after. Making your bed each morning won't give you a six-pack, but in order to do hard things daily, it requires our mind to be on board. Making your bed is one of the few things you can be perfect in, which in turn makes it easier to do other hard things throughout the day.” —Drew Manning,

fitness coach and author

Take more baths.

“Baths are not only cleansing; they are also a wonderful combination of isolation, quiet, and comfort. Soak up therapeutic medicine salts and other good-for-the-skin natural ingredients. Pour in some apple cider vinegar to restore the proper pH to your skin. Add Epsom salts to soak in magnesium, which helps relax tense, sore muscles and helps you sleep. Finally, try adding some baking soda. This can be a very effective way to pull toxins out of the body.” — Elizabeth O'Connor Cole, author, wellbeing educator, and founder of SALVEO Lifestyle