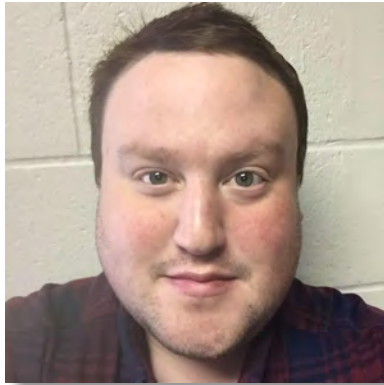


Self-Care Strategies on a Budget

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Living with chronic depression, anxiety, or other mental illness can feel like a full-time job. Daily coping can feel like a burden. However, there are a number of things you can do to help ease this burden a bit and even find moments of pleasure on the most difficult days.

Many of these things fall into the category of daily habits often known as “self-care.” Self-care includes a range of things, large and small, which you can do to care for your physical and mental health. Many of these are simple baseline activities such as staying hydrated, taking meds on schedule, sleeping enough, and eating nutritiously.

Often, though, when self-care is mentioned, people also include many more luxurious activities such as spa visits or weekend vacation getaways. For many of us living with mental illness and living on the financial edge, these activities are far beyond reach¹. That’s okay, though, because there are many stimulating and fun self-care activities that we can do right in our own neighborhoods for little or no money. I want to tell you about a few I do regularly that have enriched my life tremendously.

1. Find a Project to Get Engaged In

Whatever your abilities, it’s not hard to find a small job nearby to get involved in. Clean out that closet, paint those cabinets, reorganize a room. Just find some sizeable but manageable task to work on, and it may work wonders at refocusing your mind away from your difficulties.

2. Go Outside

Find some green space—your yard or a park, perhaps. Go spend a half hour just watching the sky, breathing in the air, and feeling the sunlight. Neuroscientists have found that regularly standing in the presence of naturally awe-inspiring sights has a tremendous benefit on our mental well-being and happiness². Nature is healing, and it will soothe your mind.

3. Get Out and Enjoy the Company of Others

Some days, you may not feel like getting out of your pajamas or even showering, but try to make yourself if you can. Put on something that makes you feel attractive and confident, and go somewhere where there are people. Even if you don’t feel up to talking, just being around life going on around you can be very restorative. Isolation isn’t healthy and only builds on itself. Break out of that shell, if only for a few minutes each day, and it might give you a different perspective.

¹ For more information on the economic challenges of living with mental illness:

<http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-By-the-Numbers>,

http://mcsilver.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/reports/Mental_Health_and_Poverty_one-sheet.pdf.

² <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-athletes-way/201505/the-power-awe-sense-wonder-promotes-loving-kindness>.

4. Mindfulness/Clear Your Mind

This one is very easy and doable anywhere. Breathe deeply, focus on a spot on the floor or wall, and just let your mind be clear. Let thoughts flow in and out without holding onto them; try to focus on your breathing. Set the burden of heavy thoughts down for a few minutes—you can get to them later—and just let your mind relax. Letting painful thoughts and emotions slide away for just a bit often helps make them fade away altogether.

5. Find Some Way to Care for Others

Find a need you can help fulfill. Get involved at a local shelter; help an elderly neighbor with yard work; join a community improvement organization. Caring for others can be healing to our own souls, too. Giving joy to someone else makes us feel more confident and needed and adds to our own sense of purpose in life. *[Find a Disciples-related health and social service nonprofit in your area to volunteer and engage with at www.nbaca.org/partners-directory.]*

These are just a few activities that bring me joy and soothe my spirit. I'd love to know what self-care activities you love to do, too!

Rev. Gabe Pfefer is an ordained Disciples of Christ minister living and serving Bethany Christian Church in Fort Worth, TX. Gabe has experience working in clinical mental health settings and as a mental health client with an anxiety disorder diagnosis. He is passionate about breaking down stigmas and exploring the connections between spiritual, physical, and mental health. Pfefer is a guest blogger for the Mental Health and Congregational Care Affinity Group, a shared effort between National Benevolent Association and Disciples Home Missions (DHM), in response to the passing of GA-1523 "Becoming a People of Welcome and Support to People with Mental Illness and/or Mental Health Issues" by the 2015 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). For more info, please visit www.nbaca.org/mental-health.