



## **HEALTH AND SELF-CARE:**

### A Look Inside Patient and Physician Perspectives on Self-care

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[DrWayneJonas.com](http://DrWayneJonas.com)

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Six in ten adults in the U.S. have a chronic disease and four in ten adults have two or more, according to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Conditions such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes are making more people sick every day and will continue to do so without behavior change and self-care. As rates of chronic disease continue to rise, self-care practices will become increasingly important to the nation's health.

This report – developed by Samueli Integrative Health Programs in concert with The Harris Poll – demonstrates the importance of self-care to patients' health and well-being, explains how to implement self-care services in the healthcare care setting, and discusses the current trends in both doctors' and patients' self-care beliefs and practices.

## A National Perspective

Findings from two surveys conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of Samueli Integrative Health Programs from May-June 2019 among more than 300 U.S. primary care physicians and more than 1,000 patients provided eye-opening results.

### Self-Care is More Than Indulgence

- Physicians and patients agree that exercise (94% physicians, 71% patients), eating healthy foods, (93% physicians, 74% patients) and getting enough sleep (92% physicians, 73% patients) qualify as self-care.

### Going Beyond Pills and Procedures to Improve Health

- More than 9 in 10 physicians (96%) believe self-care should be considered an essential part of overall health, and 88 percent of patients agree.
- Almost all physicians (97%) feel their patients would benefit from a better understanding of self-care, and almost as many (93%) would like to be able to provide their patients with information on self-care.

### A Critical Communication Gap

- Almost half of physicians (46%) believe their patients do not seem very interested in self-care, yet 72 percent of patients say they are interested in discussing it with their physician.
- A majority of patients are also interested in talking to their physicians about what is most important in their lives (57%) and their life goals (55%).
- Physicians on average say about 7 in 10 of, their patients would benefit from discussing self-care with them, but 75 percent of patients say they haven't discussed any self-care with their physician within the last two years.

### Self-Care Does Not Seem to be a Priority in Discussions with Patients

- Very few patients say they have discussed critical aspects of self-care with their primary care physician in the past two years. Only 12 percent discussed life goals, 11 percent discussed social and emotional

needs, 6 percent discussed spiritual or religious needs and 9 percent discussed complementary or alternative medicine.

- While most respondents (73% of patients, 92% of physicians) consider getting enough sleep a part of self-care, only 40 percent of physicians discussed sleep habits with their patients at during a majority of visits in the past month.

### Why Isn't Self-Care a Priority?

- Nearly all patients (97%) say they have practiced self-care. But far fewer – 39 percent – say they do so “often.”
- More than 1 in 4 Americans (28%) say they feel guilty when practicing self-care.
- 44 percent of patients believe self-care is only possible for people with “enough” time, and 35 percent believe self-care is only possible for those with “enough” money.
- For physicians who don't often discuss self-care with their patients, a lack of time was by far the most commonly cited barrier (78%) to having more self-care discussions during clinic visits.

### Physicians Face Hurdles to Self-Care

- One in 4 (25%) physicians believe burnout is preventing them from practicing self-care as much as they would like.
- One in five (20%) physicians say they do not practice their desired amount of self-care self-care because they are unable to get out of bad habits.
- A majority of physicians (59%) say demands of their job(s) prevent them from practicing their desired amount of self-care.

### Support for Self-Care

Empirical evidence from numerous disciplines, including cardiology, endocrinology, oncology and pain medicine, confirms that self-care services are safe, economical, and, most importantly, effective for treating many chronic illnesses. Although more data from larger randomized trials likely would be beneficial, there is robust evidence to suggest practices such as therapeutic yoga, massage, nutritional counseling, and journaling can enrich patients' physical, emotional, and spiritual functioning.



### Incorporating Self-Care into Patient Visits

Incorporating self-care into practice settings can be accomplished through an integrative health model and team-based care. Both approaches are patient-centered and extend beyond conventional medicine by using a collaborative approach in which physicians and patients are partners, and patients actively participate in their own care. This guidance also includes details about reimbursement and coding for behavioral health services.

## A LETTER FROM DR. WAYNE JONAS

It may surprise you to learn that as much as 80 percent of a person's health is determined by factors outside the doctor's office. Elements such as one's social and emotional health, personal behaviors, mental and spiritual functioning, and physical environment are significant influencers of health. As physicians, our job is to help our patients feel and get better. But when pills and procedures aren't enough, it leaves many of us wondering – what else can I do? The answer could lie in helping our patients leverage these “other” factors that so strongly determine health and well-being.

Behaviors such as not smoking, moderating alcohol use, consuming healthy food, engaging in regular exercise, and managing stress are vital components of chronic disease self-management. These behaviors help patients become responsible stewards of their own health. Thus, self-care approaches are the cornerstone of integrative health and good medicine.

*While there is no one definition for self-care, it generally refers to the multiple ways in which people maintain or improve their health and well-being, and prevent or cope with illness. Self-care broadly includes activities in the physical, emotional, spiritual, and social realms.*

Unfortunately, self-care practices are rarely discussed within the doctor's office, which means physicians could be missing a critical element in helping our patients become healthier.

As executive director of Samueli Integrative Health Programs and a practicing physician for nearly 40 years, I have seen the importance of incorporating self-care into my patients' treatment plans. But I also wanted to better understand how doctors and their patients view and discuss self-care in their personal lives and in their conversations with each other.

Giving our patients more control of their health and well-being will give them the agency and self-efficacy to make lasting changes in their lifestyle choices. But they can't do it alone. They need their doctors to act as partners in their care, to give them the tools and knowledge to set them up for success and to support them in building a lifetime of health and well-being. This can all be done through an integrative health approach.

## A LETTER FROM DR. WAYNE JONAS

In the Harris survey, doctors tell us they want to incorporate self-care and lifestyle changes into their discussions with their patients, and they feel relatively confident in doing it. But they don't have time. Two solutions should be considered:

1. Doctors need to release control of this topic to other health experts. They need to surround themselves with a team of nurses, nutritionists, health coaches, social workers, and other healthcare professionals, and direct their patients to these resources.
2. Doctors should encourage patients to be active participants in their self-care and health planning, including discussing these topics with their doctors (and the entire healthcare team). The Harris data shows that physicians want to have a role in this, but they are struggling to find time and often assume that patients are not interested. When patients feel supported in discussing self-care during their visits, the topic will naturally be pushed to the front of the discussion.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wayne Jonas, MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

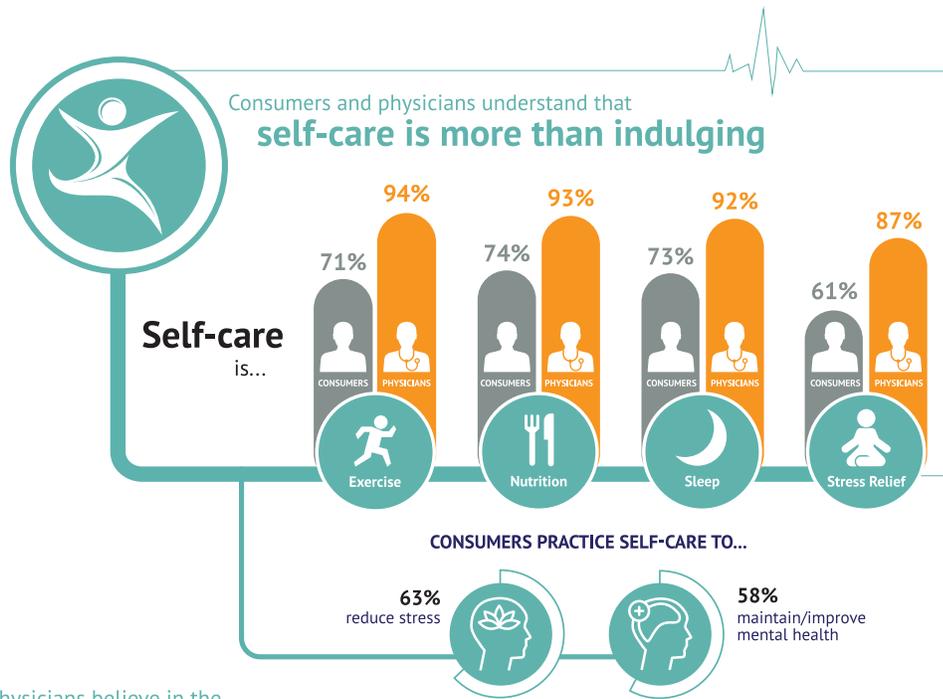
**Wayne Jonas, MD**

Executive Director, Samueli Integrative Health Programs

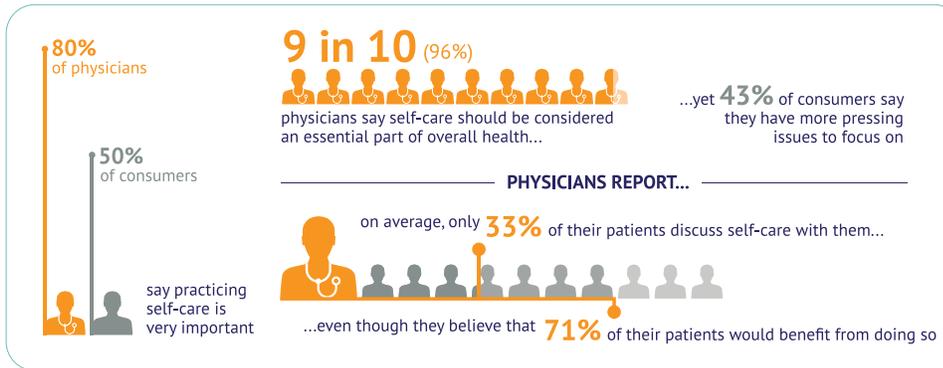
Professor of Medicine, Georgetown University

Professor of Medicine, The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

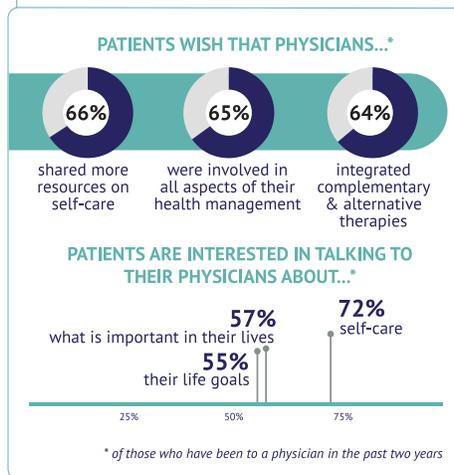
# THE VALUE OF SELF-CARE IN HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



## Physicians believe in the power of self-care



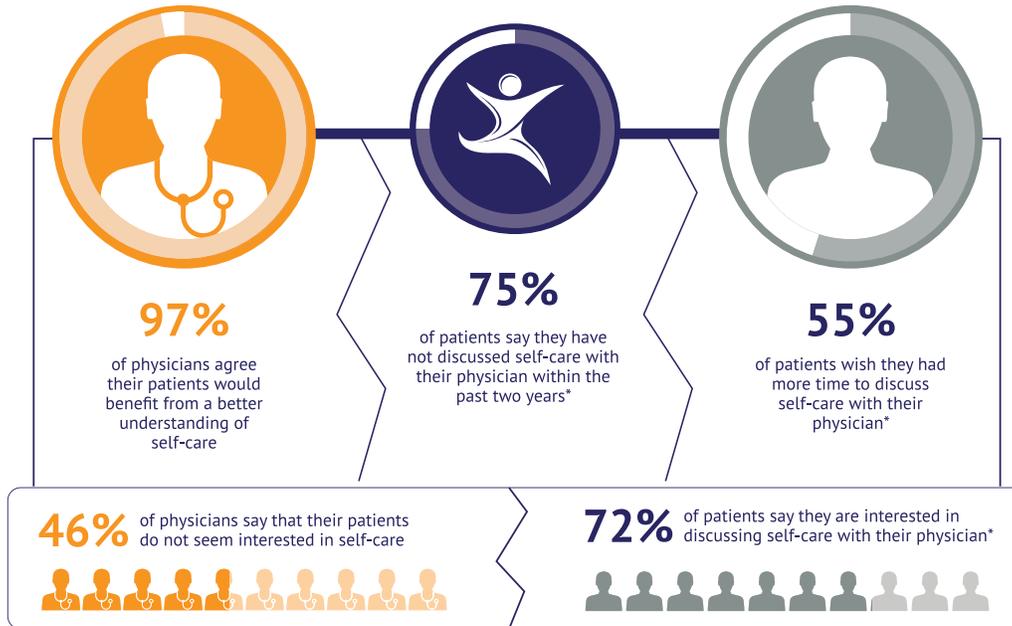
## Patients want to know more about self-care



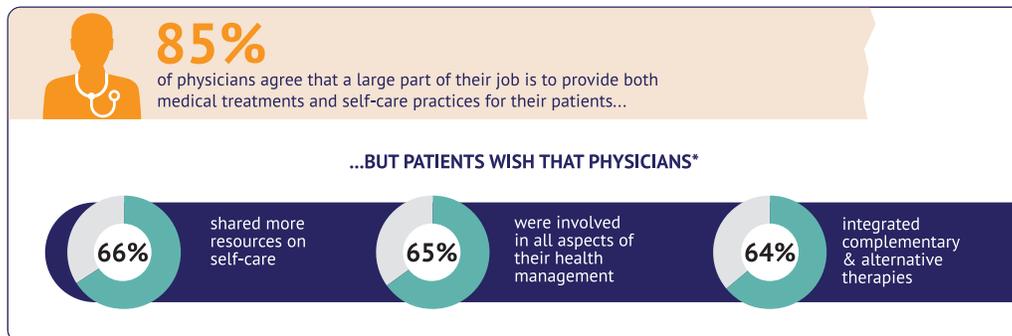
## Self-care is not always seen as an attainable goal



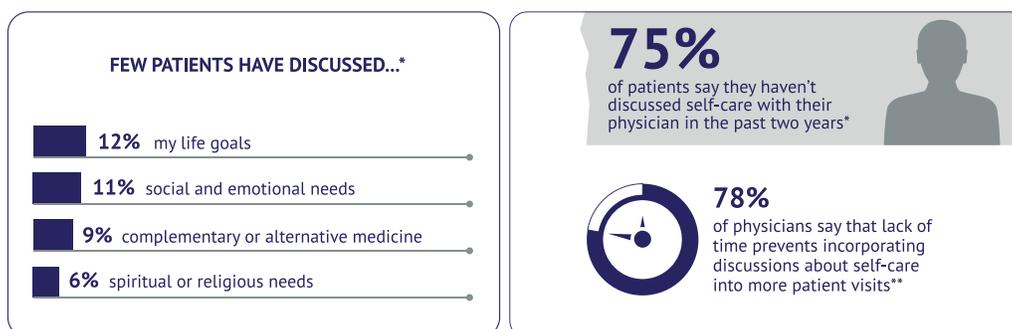
# PATIENTS' AND PHYSICIANS' PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-CARE



## Patients want physicians to be more involved in all aspects of their health and well-being



## Critical aspects of self-care are not being discussed in the doctor's office



\* of those who have been to a physician in the past two years  
 \*\* of those who discussed self-care topics at a minority of visits in the past month or never

## THE EVIDENCE BASE FOR SELF-CARE

Self-care intuitively seems like it would be effective in addressing many health ailments, such as depressed mood, anxiety, pain and stress. But what does the empirical literature say? Indeed, self-care is evidence-based and increasingly becoming a focus of interventions to improve clinical and patient-reported outcomes.

Despite its efficacy, integrating self-care into a patient's life to promote self-healing has been a challenge. The U.S. healthcare system spends a great deal of money and time looking for treatment agents that only incrementally add to overall health, rather than optimizing patients' ability for transformative healing. This creates a gap between prevention and treatment.

To help close this gap, physicians must collaborate with their patients and not simply tell them what to do. Open and honest communication is a necessary part of any effective collaboration, and the same is true of any efforts to help patients learn about and engage in self-care practices. Research suggests<sup>2</sup> that patient-physician communication about self-care is lacking, often hindered by reluctance, discomfort, fear of shame or judgment, and the incorrect assumption that patients simply are not interested. By failing to address self-care directly with patients, physicians are missing an opportunity to help them heal and ignoring a fundamental aspect of health and wellness.

### Treating and Preventing Chronic Disease



Self-care can help to prevent and treat many chronic health conditions and can:

- Reduce depression among patients with heart failure in conjunction with cognitive behavioral therapy.<sup>3</sup>
- Reduce heart failure-related hospitalizations and all-cause hospitalizations.<sup>4,5</sup>
- Reduce depression and improve social functioning among people with cancer.<sup>6</sup>
- Increase blood pressure monitoring, improve adherence to antihypertensive medication and lower blood pressure.<sup>7</sup>
- Increase mobility in patients with peripheral artery disease.<sup>7</sup>
- Increase activities of daily living and reduce mortality risk following stroke.<sup>7</sup>
- Reduce thromboembolic events in patients with atrial fibrillation.<sup>7</sup>
- Improve self-management of diabetes including physical activity, healthcare use and managing glucose.<sup>8</sup>

# WHAT DO THE DATA TELL US ABOUT SELF-CARE?

## FINDINGS FROM THE SAMUELI INTEGRATIVE HEALTH PROGRAMS/HARRIS POLL SURVEY

In an effort to better understand current self-care beliefs, desires, and practices among physicians and patients, The Harris Poll, on behalf of Samuéli Integrative Health Programs, conducted an online poll of 1,006 U.S. adults ages 18 and older and of 304 physicians specializing in internal medicine or family practice. Both polls were conducted in May and June 2019.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND HIGHLIGHTS

Findings from the survey underscored the importance of self-care to patients and physicians, but also its relative absence in physician-patient interactions. Below are summaries of key findings and highlights of detailed statistics that clarify the trends observed.

## SELF-CARE IS MORE THAN INDULGENCE

Despite common depictions in the media of self-care as activities like shopping or indulging in a favorite treat, patients seem to understand that **self-care is actually a broad concept that encompasses physical, mental, social, and spiritual needs**. Patients and physicians report defining self-care through a variety of activities that enrich their lives and well-being, such as exercise, eating healthy foods, getting enough sleep, and stress relief.



## WHY PATIENTS PRACTICE SELF-CARE

Additionally, 60 percent of patients say taking care of their mental health also qualifies as self-care.

**In fact, Patients practice self-care to reduce stress and to maintain or improve their mental health.**

63%  
reduce stress



58%  
maintain/improve  
mental health

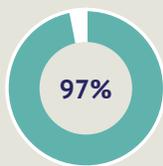


# WHAT DO THE DATA TELL US ABOUT SELF-CARE?

## GOING BEYOND PILLS AND PROCEDURES TO IMPROVE HEALTH

More than 9 in 10 physicians (96%) believe self-care should be considered an essential part of overall health, and 88 percent of patients agree.

Even more so than patients, physicians seem to value the role self-care plays in health and well-being, and they want to offer their patients more information on the topic. Fortunately, self-care is something patients say they want to learn more about and discuss with their physicians.



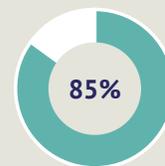
97%

Physicians feel their patients would benefit from a better understanding of self-care



93%

Physicians would like to be able to provide their patients with more information on self-care



85%

Physicians agree that a large part of their job is to provide both medical treatments and self-care practices for their patients

## A CRITICAL COMMUNICATION GAP

Physicians report only about one-third of their patients discuss self-care with them.

Furthermore, many physicians mistakenly believe that their patients are not interested in self-care, but a majority of patients say they want to discuss both self-care and life goals with their physicians. **They also wish their physicians shared more resources on self-care (66%), were more involved in all aspects of their health management (65%), and incorporated complementary and alternative therapies into their care (64%).**



*Almost half of physicians (46%) believe their patients are not interested in discussing self-care.*

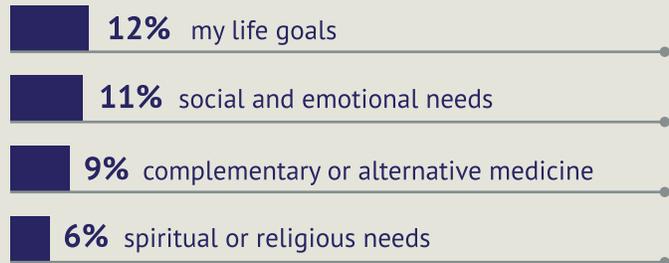


*A majority of patients (72%) are interested in talking to their physicians about self-care.*

# WHAT DO THE DATA TELL US ABOUT SELF-CARE?

## SELF-CARE DOES NOT SEEM TO BE A PRIORITY IN DISCUSSIONS WITH PATIENTS

Self-care is not front-and-center in the physician's office. While many patients say they have discussed aspects of self-care such as exercise, diet, and sleep with their physician, in the past two years fewer discuss other critical self-care aspects of well-being, such as their **life goals, social and emotional needs, complementary and alternative medicine, and spiritual or religious needs.**



While most people (73% of patients, 92% of physicians) consider getting enough sleep a part of self-care, only 40 percent of physicians discussed sleep habits with their patients at a majority of visits in the past month. Similarly, only about 36 percent discussed stress management, and only 51 percent discussed mental health with patients at a majority of visits.

## WHY ISN'T SELF-CARE A PRIORITY?

Some people have difficulty engaging in self-care because of a lack of time, lack of money, life demands (e.g., family, job) and feelings of guilt.

Nearly all patients (97%) say they practice self-care. But far fewer – 39 percent – say they do so “often.”



*Three out of four patients say they haven't discussed self-care with their physician in the past 2 years.*



**44%** believe self-care is only possible for those with enough time



**35%** believe self-care is only possible for those with enough money

## WHAT DO THE DATA TELL US ABOUT SELF-CARE?

### MORE THAN 1 IN 4 AMERICANS SAY THEY FEEL GUILTY WHEN PRACTICING SELF-CARE.



Women are more likely than men to cite barriers that prevent them from practicing their desired amount of self-care, particularly being too tired (31% vs. 20%) and feeling guilty for taking time for themselves (16% vs. 7%).

In addition to feelings of guilt, 19 percent of patients say they simply are unable to get out of bad habits. Further, many patients believe self-care is only possible for people with “enough” time, and some believe self-care is only possible for those with “enough” money.

**For physicians, a lack of time was by far the most commonly cited barrier (78%) to having self-care discussions with patients during more clinic visits.**

A lack of comfort may also be a factor. Although not cited specifically as a barrier, only 4 in 10 doctors say they feel “very comfortable” talking with patients about topics like life goals (38%) and what’s important in their lives (39%), and a similar proportion are “somewhat comfortable” (43% and 44% respectively).

# WHAT DO THE DATA TELL US ABOUT SELF-CARE?



## Physicians Also Face Hurdles to Self-Care

Patients aren't the only ones trying to overcome challenges to self-care. In The Harris Poll survey, 80 percent of physicians say it's personally very important for them to practice self-care, but only 57 percent practice it often. Even though physicians are often armed with knowledge about the importance of self-care, they frequently find reasons not to engage in it. Some of those reasons include:



### **Burnout**

One in 4 (25%) believe burnout is preventing them from practicing their desired amount of self-care.



### **Difficulty Establishing Healthier Habits**

20 percent of physicians say they do not practice self-care because they are unable to get out of bad habits.



### **Demands of Their Jobs**

A majority of physicians (59%) say demands of their job(s) prevent them from practicing self-care.

## Physicians and Patients Don't Always See Eye-to-Eye on Self-Care

### Physicians might think...

*"Most of my patients are not interested in self-care."*

*"Self-care is vital to my patients' health and well-being and should be discussed with them."*

*"My job is to offer both medical treatments as well as help my patients improve their self-care practices."*

### But what patients tell us is...

72 percent of patients say they are interested in talking about self-care. Further, 57 percent of patients are interested in talking about what is most important in their lives and 55 percent are interested in discussing their life goals.

75 percent of patients say they haven't discussed self-care with their physician in the past two years.

Two-thirds of patients want more resources on self-care. Further, 65 percent want their doctors to be involved in all aspects of their health management, and 64 percent wish their physicians incorporated complementary and alternative therapies into their care.

## DEFINING SELF-CARE

**W**hen talking about self-care, many patients think this means activities like shopping or indulging in their favorite dessert. Others think of self-care as little more than exercising and eating well. None of these accurately paint the whole picture. The core of well-being comes from how someone feels about themselves - their life, and their relationships, as well as the choices they make for their health.

There is no universal definition of self-care. According to the World Health Organization, self-care is “the ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a health-care provider.”

*Only about 10 to 20 percent of a patient’s health is due to medical care; the other 80 to 90 percent of health is socially and personally determined.*

One reason why self-care is so critical is its connection to chronic disease management. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, chronic illnesses, including cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer, are the leading cause of death and disability in the United States, affecting 6 out of every 10 adults.<sup>1</sup> Chances are that every patient has at least one chronic illness. Increasingly, self-management is playing a larger role in the prevailing treatment paradigm because this approach empowers patients to independently and actively manage their symptoms and is both effective and economical.<sup>9</sup>

*Self-care is a key component of chronic disease self-management that can help patients derive better outcomes while allowing them to serve as autonomous agents of healing and behavior change.*

Self-care is a multidimensional construct, encompassing a mind-body-spirit connection. How one eats, moves, relaxes, and connects with others all play a major role in healing the body, mind, and spirit. Helping patients identify ways to live a healthy and meaningful life across all dimensions, will help to foster their self-care practices.



## Key Dimensions to Practicing Self-care

- **Spiritual and Mental:** The inner environment often holds the key to healing and well-being. This sometimes comes from a spiritual or religious life, or one grounded in meaning and purposeful activities. Often, it involves helping others. It can also be found in creative pursuit or family activities – any endeavor that brings purpose and meaning beyond the individual.
- **Social and Emotional:** The social environment is essential to health and healing. Both health and happiness are socially contagious. Social cohesion is not only health enhancing but also essential for sustainable behavioral change in any culture and in any setting.
- **Behavioral and Lifestyle:** This includes everything from stress management, physical activity, sleep, nutrition and complementary medical care. Each of these components are essential to developing a daily routine embedded with self-care practices. These practices can enhance health and strengthen personal resilience on their own.
- **Body and External:** A healthy outer environment affects and supports a healthy person. This dimension attends to the physical structures and settings in which we live and how these facilitate healing and minimize adverse impact on and from the earth.



## Types of Self Care

### **Nutrition Counseling**

Nutrition counseling refers to educational approaches designed to help patients adopt healthy diets and eating behaviors. Nutrition counseling has been linked to a wide variety of desirable outcomes,<sup>10</sup> including improvements in the intake of healthy foods (e.g., more vegetables and fruit, less processed meat and sugar), physical activity (e.g., planned exercise, daily steps), micronutrient intake (e.g., calcium), macronutrient intake (e.g., protein, fiber), dietary knowledge and self-efficacy, blood pressure, weight loss/maintenance, calorie intake, fasting glucose and insulin levels, and blood cholesterol levels.

### **Therapeutic Yoga**

Therapeutic yoga is a form of yoga that requires practitioners to receive additional training in anatomy, physiology, and psychology to provide personalized therapy to help their clients manage chronic conditions. Therapeutic yoga particularly helps patients with stress, mental health conditions, and pain management issues.<sup>11</sup>

### **Massage Therapy**

Massage therapy is the practice of administering pressure to the body's soft tissue. While the more common practice of massage therapy helps loosen and relax tissue, other forms of this practice can help treat serious health issues like chronic back and neck pain,<sup>12</sup> depression,<sup>13</sup> osteoarthritis<sup>13</sup>, fibromyalgia,<sup>14</sup> and headaches.<sup>15</sup>

### **Breathwork**

Breathwork is the conscious control by a patient over their breathing patterns. Breathwork can help focus the patient's mind to aid in mental, physical, and spiritual health concerns. This practice has multiple physiological and chemical effects such as altering heart rate, blood pressure, and cortisol, commonly referred to as the stress hormone.<sup>6,1</sup>

### **Journaling**

Journaling is a safe way for patients to explore difficult or traumatic issues and provide healing. Studies show journaling is an effective way to reduce sleep difficulties, lower cardiovascular-related inflammation, manage symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and alleviate depression.<sup>18-21</sup> It is also a self-care technique for people who are caring for others. Writing down thoughts and emotions can help bring order to chaotic and stressful experiences.



### Correcting Patient Misconceptions About Self-Care

**Myth:**

*You must earn the right to practice self-care.*

**Fact:** Self-care is a right, not a reward. Believing otherwise suggests that taking care of ourselves is optional. Rather than encouraging patients to incentivize their goals with leisure, physicians should help patients build self-care into their daily routine so they look forward to achieving their goals while keeping their mind, body, and spirit connection intact.

**Myth:**

*Self-care is costly.*

**Fact:** Self-care does not come with a price tag. Many patients think self-care is expensive, like buying luxury skin-care products and engaging in “retail therapy.” But this is not so. Simply put, self-care means respecting, loving, and caring for yourself. Journaling, reading, meditating, going on a walk, chatting with a friend, or playing with a pet are all effective ways to decrease stress and increase well-being at little or no cost.

**Myth:**

*Self-care means indulgence.*

**Fact:** Self-care means taking responsibility for your own health. During stressful times, people often treat themselves with unhealthy behaviors, like bingeing on a tub of ice cream. Indulgences are fine from time to time, but self-care is really about nourishing your mind, body, and spirit. This nourishment comes from engaging in a variety of health-promoting activities—not just from that extra slice of chocolate cake.

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## SELF-CARE'S ROLE IN INTEGRATIVE HEALTH

Integrative health is first and foremost the pursuit of personal health and well-being, while addressing disease as needed, with the support of a health team dedicated to all proven approaches—conventional, complementary, and self-care. Optimal health and well-being arise when one attends to all factors that influence health, including medical treatment, personal behaviors, mental and spiritual factors, and the social, economic, and environmental determinants of health.

Conventional medicine is the delivery of evidence-based approaches for disease prevention and treatment currently taught, delivered, and paid for by the mainstream healthcare system. Integrative medicine is the coordinated delivery of conventional medicine combined with evidence-based complementary and alternative medicine designed to enhance health and well-being. Self-care involves the incorporation of healthy, evidence-based behavioral approaches into conventional medical practice to enhance health and healing. Thus, integrative health redefines the relationship between the practitioner and patient by focusing on the whole person and the whole community. It is informed by scientific evidence and makes use of all appropriate preventative, therapeutic, and palliative approaches, healthcare professionals, and disciplines to promote optimal health and well-being.

A key dimension of a person-centered, integrative health practice is assisting patients in making lifestyle, behavioral, and self-care changes. Empirical evidence supports the use of behaviors such as smoking cessation, moderate alcohol use, eating a healthy diet, regularly engaging in exercise, and managing stress as critical to self-management of chronic disease. Thus, these self-care approaches are the cornerstone of integrative health and good medicine.

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## SELF-CARE AND SHARED DECISION MAKING

Self-care and shared decision making are both evidence-based approaches to empowering patients to become autonomous agents of change in their own health and well-being. Both also help bridge gaps in the traditional patient-physician relationship, such as lack of communication, lack of collaboration, and a reliance on providers to define problems, select treatments, and set goals.

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## WHY NOW?

We are entering a new world of medicine and healthcare, a world in which attention is increasingly being paid to all the determinants of health, not just the physical manifestations of disease. In this emerging world, incentives are being realigned to promote health and wellness rather than simply treating the disease.

It is time to rebalance the health system to address patients' issues holistically, listen closely to them, and practice in an interdisciplinary manner with providers outside of conventional medicine. These elements are required to be successful in the new normal and to bring self-care into the equation.

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## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The Self-Care Survey was conducted online by The Harris Poll on behalf of Samueli Integrative Health Programs among 1,006 U.S. adults ages 18+ (surveyed from May 23 to June 4, 2019) and 304 physicians who specialize in internal medicine or family practice (surveyed from May 23 to June 19, 2019). For complete research methodology, including weighting variables and subgroup sample sizes, please contact Kathleen Petty at [KPetty@TheReisGroup.com](mailto:KPetty@TheReisGroup.com).

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### About Samueli Integrative Health Programs

Samueli Integrative Health Programs is dedicated to the promotion of personal health and well-being with the support of health teams dedicated to all proven approaches, including conventional, complementary and self-care.

[DrWayneJonas.com](http://DrWayneJonas.com)

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