

# Self-care for nursing students



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## Introduction

Nursing is a noble profession where a nurse's physical and mental well-being is paramount to practice as a nurse. Self-care is as important as caring for others in nursing. This paper discusses the importance of self-care for student nurses. School of Nursing in the Maldives National University offers different nursing programs ranging from one to four years in duration, where fifty percent

practical and another fifty percent theory components are required. Student nurses enroll in the basic nursing programs when they are eighteen or nineteen years old, which is often an age when physiological and psychological changes take place. These changes could contribute to uncertainty and added stress during student life. Students may lack a comprehensive understanding of appropriate information on managing themselves during stressful situations. Moreover, to address the knowledge gap about self-care, it is crucial to have relevant information on essential components of self-care.

## Stress and self-care

Dorothea Orem's Self-Care Theory defines self-care as activities and practices performed independently by a mature individual to promote and maintain personal well-being throughout life (Berbiglia & Banfield 2010). Nursing

students and other healthcare professionals report higher stress levels than their educational counterparts (Ashcraft & Gatto, 2015). The American Nurses Association (2013) states that nurses who engage in healthy personal and professional habits and practice positive self-care make better educators, patient advocates, and role models. There are varying degrees of stressors that student nurses go through during their student life. Three types of stressors are identified in the literature and they are clinical, academic, and external (Jimenez et al., 2010). Furthermore, a study was conducted to investigate bachelor nursing students' perspectives on self-care and understand their value in health promotion. The study findings revealed that the average time spent on self-care activities was 57.2 minutes daily, excluding sleep, ranging from 0-180 minutes. Nevertheless, in this study, students rated their health as 7.18 on a scale of 0 being poor and 10 being excellent. However, 40% of the students reported feeling overweight, 36% reported 2 or more sick days in the previous six months, and 32% reported regularly seeking medical checkups (Nevins et al., 2016).

Most of the time, nurses and nursing students' workload puts a lot of

stress on the nurses and student nurses. Some of the stresses to the student nurses include seeing the suffering of patients and relatives and being unable to respond appropriately to the doctors', teachers', and patients' questions (Blum, 2014). A systematic review using seven systematic reviews and forty-two primary data from Bahrain, Pakistan, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Palestine, Oman, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan undergoing nursing clinical training found that the prevalence range of low, moderate, and high perceived stress among nursing student was 0.8–65%, 5.9–84.5%, and 6.7–99.2%, respectively (Chaabane et al., 2021). The everyday clinical training stressors identified from the same review were assignments, workload, and patient care. It is, therefore, imperative to reduce stress among nursing students. Anecdotal evidence from the Maldivian context also suggests that students suffer from lots of stress and anxiety due to increased workload with study requirements as well as managing time to meet up the deadlines.

One of the strategies to reduce stress is to focus on self-care. Self-care must be learned and performed deliberately and continuously in time and conformity with the regulatory requirements of individuals (Berbiglia & Banfield 2010). The common themes for

self-care include a balanced diet, rest and sleep, and regular exercise. In addition, nursing institutions are encouraged to provide a conducive learning environment and establish a robust support system for students and staff (Chaabane et al., 2021). Coping strategies and social support, solving family problems, spiritual support, relaxation, and self-reliance are well documented in the literature for effective stress management strategies by nursing students (Abd Elaziz et al., 2015).

### **Strategies for self-care?**

According to Crane & Ward (2016), there are different physical body self-care techniques. For self-healing and self-care, activating the parasympathetic nervous system is essential. The following methods involve activation of the parasympathetic nervous system; as a result, it is a self-healing solid and stress-reducing technique that includes deep breathing exercises, meditation, relaxation exercises, mindfulness, yoga, tai chi, qigong, hypnosis, and visualization. Moreover, Crane & Ward (2016) suggest six self-care techniques for nurses to consider. They are **breathing exercises**, **body awareness**, **relaxation techniques**, **meditation** that elicits the relaxation response, physical affection, **exercise**, and **nutrition**. In addition, **financial well-being** has a significant impact on mental

health, and financial well-being is also a measure of stress, anxiety, and depression (Hassan et al., 2021). Another crucial consideration is the concept of a **digital detox**. In the contemporary era of digital technology, students find themselves extensively relying on technology for diverse purposes. Consequently, it becomes imperative to grasp the potential adverse effects associated with prolonged screen exposure, emphasizing the significance of disconnecting to safeguard mental and emotional well-being. Furthermore, having strong faith, uptake of spiritual connections, and performing prayers are essential. It is, therefore, necessary to select the best strategies for the individual to adapt and help cope with the stresses of life. Different individuals learn to cope differently. Nonetheless, professional help should be considered whenever there is a need. A recent study on undergraduate psychiatric nursing students who introduced self-care during their courses and the results reported that the students found value in self-care activities that have the potential to reduce burnout, increase retention, and improve student outcomes (Snyder, 2020).

In the School of Nursing, the Maldives National University conducts an information session on self-care for the newly enrolled nursing students each

semester. Self-help and peer support facilities are available for MNU students by the Faculty of Health Sciences. However, an organized and sustainable program should be planned for nursing students through the curriculum. Nurse educators are encouraged to support in identifying their self-care strategies and reflect and act to overcome the stresses (Slemon et al., 2021).

## Conclusion

Self-care is imperative for one's health and to take care of others, especially in a profession like nursing. This paper briefly outlined the stresses and their consequences with the relevant literature. In addition, self-care strategies for student nurses are discussed in the article.

## References

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