

## Simplified Speech #161 – Do you practice self-care?

AD-FREE

### Episode description

Self-care is a term that has been around for a long time. However, it has become more popular recently because people are paying more attention to taking care of their physical and mental health in a fast-paced world. In this Simplified Speech episode, Andrew and Kassy chat about their personal self-care routines and some tips for listeners. If you've been feeling stressed out lately, then this is a great episode to check out!

Simplified Speech is a Culips series that features easy to understand conversations that help beginner and intermediate English learners improve their listening skills. We have quality study guides and transcripts available for all Culips members.

### Fun fact

It can be very difficult to practice self-care when you're stressed out. The next time you want to relax and calm down, try this grounding technique that uses all of your senses:

- Notice and name five things you can see
- Notice and name four things you can feel
- Notice and name three things you can hear
- Notice and name two things you can smell
- Notice and name one thing you can touch

This simple exercise can help you disconnect from your stress and pay more attention to your body and environment. Try it out! You just might feel a little bit calmer afterwards.

### Expressions included in the study guide

- To take a toll on
- To squeeze in
- To go out on a limb
- Love-hate relationship
- To take full advantage of
- Band-aid



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## Transcript

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Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

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**Andrew:** Simplified Speech episode 161. Do you practice self-care? With Kassy and Andrew.

So, Kassy, maybe we'll start by talking about what we think self-care is, what is our personal definition of this term? And I'll ask you to go first. Could you let us know what pops into your mind when you think of self-care?

**Kassy:** First, I think of why we might need self-care. There's a lot of day-to-day stressors in our life, you know, work, maybe kids, traffic, commute, and it starts **to take a toll on** your body and your mind. So, self-care is something that you do in order to relax, unwind, and just feel better.

**Andrew:** Nice, great definition. Yeah, I think self-care is about putting yourself first and making yourself a priority. So like you said, in life there are so many stressors, like work, going to the office, taking care of your children, maybe family responsibilities with your extended family, maybe getting stuck in a traffic jam, like you mentioned, we could go on and on and on. The list of things that cause us stress in life is endless. And those can wear us down, those can make us feel tired and make us feel terrible. And so self-care is all about making those things that stress us out and drain us of our energy and make us feel bad, putting those aside, and making ourself the priority in life. And so taking care of ourself first, as opposed to putting somebody else or something else ahead of yourself.

**Kassy:** Exactly. And, Andrew, we should also mention that there are so many different types of self-care, not just activities, but ways that you can relax, right? Just how the stressors in our life are various, so are the ways that we can heal ourself. We can heal ourself through some sort of physical self-care, mental self-care, spiritual self-care, the list could go on and on.

**Andrew:** Yeah, so why don't we get into some of the different things that you could actually do? Like you just mentioned, mental self-care, spiritual self-care, physical self-care. But I'm wondering what you think of all of those categories, Kassy, like, for me—why don't we start with mental self-care? I think that is one that's really important, right? It's important that people take care of their mental health. For me, the first thing that pops into my mind is meditation, or maybe relaxing, doing some kind of relaxation process or meditation practice. What about you, Kassy? Is that what you think of first as well?

**Kassy:** I think of that for others, I never meditate. I think it's really good, though, I should start. For me, I like to think a lot, maybe before bed, or when I wake up in the morning, you know, what went well throughout the day, what could be improved, or what I'm hoping for in the future. That could be stressful for some people, too. But for me, it organizes my thoughts.

**Andrew:** Yeah, that's almost a kind of meditation. You know, there's lots of different meditation practices out there and I am by no means an expert, so I don't want to share too much wrong information accidentally. But there is one kind of meditative practice called mindfulness. And mindfulness is all about being aware of the thoughts that you're thinking. So instead of just running on automatic mode, it's about taking a moment and thinking about your thoughts and thinking about your feelings. And why do you think this way? Why do you feel this way? And being aware of your thoughts, which is something that, oddly enough, we don't do naturally, right? We have to like actually put some effort into examining our thoughts, examining our feelings and being aware and noticing how we feel and think.

And I think, Kassy, that sort of sounds like a form of mindfulness to me, like you're examining your day, examining what you want to do in the future. So, yeah, definitely, I would say that is self-care. And maybe we could even say it's a form of mindfulness. But like I said, I'm not an expert about the topic.

**Kassy:** Yeah, I think one more thing that people do for mental self-care is journalling. My sister is a big journaller and she does it for both happy events that she wants to, like, keep those memories up so she doesn't lose them, but also for sad events or things that anger

her. When she writes them down in the journal, it's almost like she's letting those memories go and they're being flushed into the pages instead of trapped in her mind and in her heart.

**Andrew:** Yeah, have you ever tried doing any journalling like that before? I recently tried myself. And I heard that writing a journal before you go to bed at the end of the day is a really great practice that can help you get a more relaxed sleep, especially if you tend to get stressed out about the future and what you have to do in the future. So if you have many things to do the next day, or if you have a busy week coming up the next week, then before you go to bed, you can write out about all of the things that you have to do and maybe talk about how you want to solve those problems or how you're going to handle them, something like that. And it doesn't have to be a long journal entry, it can just be a few sentences.

I heard from a friend that this is a really great thing to do before you go to bed, so that you kind of release it from your mind. And then when you go to bed, your mind's not ruminating on it. And that means thinking about it again and again and again. So you're not thinking about it again and again and again as you try to sleep, which is something that I personally have a problem with. I'll go to bed and I'll think about all the little things that I have to do the next day, and how am I going to do this? How am I going to do that? How am I going to schedule my day? And so I thought this practice could be really great for me. So I gave it a shot and it seemed to work OK. But then I felt like I was too busy in my day to **squeeze it in** at the end of the day. So I only did it for like 3 days and then I kind of fell out of the practice, unfortunately. It seems like it's a good thing to do, but I had a hard time fitting it into my schedule.

**Kassy:** Yeah, I don't do it nowadays either. But I think it really helped me when I was young, upper elementary school, middle school, high school. At that age, you have a lot of emotions and they're strong emotions. And I remember getting so angry over things that I wouldn't even think about now as an adult. But writing in a journal really helped me to just release that anger.

**Andrew:** Yeah, absolutely, teenage angst, right?

Kassy, I was speaking just about sleep a moment ago. And we should talk about sleep, because I think that is a big form of self-care, actually, is sleep. And in fact, this morning, my wife had to wake up extra early, she had a special appointment this morning so she had to wake up extra early. And as a result, I woke up as well. I'm a very, very light sleeper and if she just makes like a slight little rustle or noise in the bedroom, then I wake up. And also our dog woke up when my wife was up this morning. So the whole family was up extra early today. And I got up and took the dog for a walk and when I came home, it was still early in the morning. Now, some days, I would just say, "OK, I'm up, whatever, let's get the day started." In fact, that would be my normal kind of default mode, that's what I'd usually do. But today, I was feeling especially tired. And I had kind of a flexible morning schedule where I didn't really have to do anything at a certain time in the morning. So I just went back to bed. That was like my form of self-care. And I knew –

**Kassy:** Those are the best.

**Andrew:** The best days, right? I knew that we were recording this episode about self-care today as well. So I thought I should take care of myself. I should, you know, get some sleep, get some rest and feel rested up. And I think, in fact, that is one of the best ways that we can take care of ourselves is getting enough sleep. And it just doesn't make sense to push myself and grind out a bunch of work or do something like that if I'm tired. I might as well invest in a couple extra hours of sleep, feeling good, and then I can just be more productive, more effective in my daily life. So I practiced some self-care this morning and I slept for an extra 2 hours. It was awesome.

**Kassy:** Yeah, I feel the same way. I love those naps that you just kind of have pop up out of nowhere and you're like, you kind of feel like you have this happy present, you know? It's not a physical present, but you go, "Wow, I have free time, I can just use it the way I want to."

Another thing with sleep these days that I've noticed is that I've really started going to bed earlier and it has improved my energy and my mental state so much. It's not necessarily a self-care that you'd think about because it's just a daily routine kind of schedule. But that extra hour of sleep, going to bed an hour earlier than you normally would, is so beneficial.

**Andrew:** Yeah, in fact, I am gonna say it, Kassy, and maybe you will disagree or agree. But I will say, I will **go out on a limb** here and say, sleep is the best thing you can do for your self-care. Because, you know, like, if we're talking about meditation, or something, of course, this is good. And of course I think this is something that people should do if they're interested in it, it will be helpful for your life. And I've noticed in the past, when I've done it, it's been helpful for me. But you don't notice a result immediately, it's not a tangible result. In fact, sometimes you have to practice for years and years and years. And it could be like learning a language almost, like although you're making progress and you're moving forward, you don't always notice it and you don't always feel it. However, with sleep, it's like if you're tired, and then you sleep and you get a good sleep, you wake up and you feel better. I can't speak for everyone, but at least for me, every time I go to sleep, and I wake up, I feel better if I get a good sleep, right? It like always improves my mood, it always improves my outlook and my ability to focus and to work and function well. All of these things get improved immediately, like after only 8 hours. It's amazing, so.

**Kassy:** Yeah, I'm sure listeners who don't get enough sleep, they probably hear this all the time and they go, "Yeah, yeah, I know." But we're just gonna say here. It's true, guys. I know you hear it a million times, believe it.

**Andrew:** So, we talked a lot about mental self-care. We also kind of mentioned spiritual self-care, because I think meditation and mindfulness kind of get into that spiritual territory. And there's other different things that people can do to take care of their spiritual well-being, maybe depending on their religion or their personal beliefs. So maybe we won't get into that too much. But what about physical self-care, Kassy? We could say that sleep is a physical self-care. Sleep is like the ultimate self-care for everything. But what are some other self-care practices to help us improve our physical health? And what do you do physically to take care of your self-care?

**Kassy:** I have two. One of them is kind of a **love-hate relationship** and that is exercise. I know, every time before exercise, it's kind of a stressor because I don't really want to go and I'm lazy. But when I'm actually doing the activity, it is a big stress relief. And I, you

know, get those, the blood flowing, the endorphins running through my body. So, yeah, **love-hate relationship**.

But another physical stress reliever self-care opportunity is getting some sort of massage or, you know, nail care or shampoo or something like that. It's really popular here in Thailand to get, you know, some sort of body self-care. And I have **been taking full advantage** of that while I've been living here.

**Andrew:** Yeah, that's awesome. Kassy, that's great. And I agree that exercise, although it can be kind of a two-sided coin, right? There's the good part of exercise, like feeling good and having the endorphins surge through our body and having our mood elevated. All of these things are great, but at the same time, sometimes it can be bothersome, and we can feel tired or have sore muscles after exercising. So, yeah, there's advantages and disadvantages to that.

Kassy, before we wrap it up, I want to ask you one other thing, and that is about treating yourself. Do you think treating yourself is a form of self-care? You know, like if you've had a really stressful week and then at the end of the week you treat yourself to a big piece of chocolate cake, or maybe you go to a hotel and you spend a night in a hotel in your city, and, you know, you enjoy the big king-size fluffy bed and just relax or something like that. Like treating yourself, buying a present for yourself, is this a form of self-care?

**Kassy:** I do think it is a form of self-care, but I think it's a little bit like putting a **band-aid** on a giant cut. It soothes the wound for a little bit, but it doesn't really solve the issues lying underneath that caused the big amount of stress.

**Andrew:** Well said, Kassy.

That brings us to the end of this lesson. Talk to you next time. Bye.

## Detailed Explanations

### To take a toll on Expression

In the very beginning of the episode, Kassy introduces the topic of self-care. She explains that it's important to practice self-care because the stress we experience in daily life such as taking care of kids, working, and commuting can **take a toll on** our bodies and minds.

**To take a toll** is another way of saying to harm. This expression refers to something that gradually causes negative effects over time, rather than all at once. For example, one day in the sun won't hurt you, but years without using sunscreen can **take a toll on** your skin. Similarly, if you worked every day without a day off for several weeks, the workload would start **to take a toll on** your physical and mental health.

**To take a toll on** can be followed by a person, a physical object, or something more abstract like a feeling or system. For instance, a lack of trust can **take a toll on** your marriage. This expression can also be used without an object. In this case, you just have to drop the word "on." For example, taking care of children every day can really **take a toll**.

Here are a couple more examples with **to take a toll on**:

**Tracy:** I'll be so relieved when our final exams are over.

**Benjamin:** Seriously! I feel like I've been studying nonstop for weeks.

**Tracy:** Yeah. I stayed up until 4 a.m. three nights this week studying for my physics final. The stress is really starting **to take a toll on** my body. Did you notice the dark circles under my eyes?

**Benjamin:** Yes, I did. You really look exhausted. You should try to get some rest tonight.

**Catherine:** James, I heard you're sick with COVID. Are you doing OK?

**James:** Yeah. I've had it for about a week now. It was pretty rough at first, but it feels more like a cold now. At this point, the worst part about it is being stuck at home. Not being able to see anyone all week has really **taken a toll on** me. I'm not used to being so isolated!

**Catherine:** You must be super bored! How about we FaceTime later? Maybe that will cheer you up.

## To squeeze in

Phrasal verb

After discussing meditation, Andrew and Kassy talk about the benefits of journaling at the end of the day. Andrew mentions that he recently tried journaling before going to bed, but he ended up quitting because he wasn't able **to squeeze it in** after a long day.

**To squeeze in** is a phrasal verb that means to fit into a tightly packed schedule. For example, someone who works from morning until night may try **to squeeze in** a few 5-minute breaks throughout the day to practice self-care. If you **squeeze a person in**, it means that you make time to see them. For instance, your secretary may ask you, "Can you **squeeze Margaret in** after your meeting with David?"

**To squeeze in** is a separable phrasal verb, which means that the direct object can be between "squeeze" and "in" or after "squeeze in." For example, you can **squeeze the appointment in** OR you can **squeeze in the appointment**. However, please remember that if you use a direct object pronoun such as "him" or "it," it must go between "squeeze" and "in." For instance, you might ask, "Do you think you could **squeeze it in** tomorrow?"

Here are a few more examples with **to squeeze in**:

**Barbara:** Charles, guess what? I'm coming to Atlanta next week! When can I see you?

**Charles:** Oh, work is going to be really busy for me next week. Let's see ... I think I can **squeeze you in** for dinner on Tuesday evening. How does that sound?

**Barbara:** I can't wait!

**Charles:** Splendid! I'll send you the address of the restaurant later tonight.

**Chris:** Honey, I think you're planning too many activities for our vacation.

**Sue:** What do you mean? We might never get the chance to go to Hawaii again! I want to explore and try as many new things as we can!

**Chris:** I understand, but vacations are also about relaxing. I don't think it's realistic to have our mornings, afternoons, and evenings full of appointments and reservations. We need **to squeeze in** a little bit of rest and relaxation time, too!

**Sue:** I suppose you're right. How about we just plan one activity for each day, then?

**Chris:** Yes, that sounds great. Thanks for understanding.

## To go out on a limb

### Expression

Halfway through the episode, Kassy and Andrew start to talk about the importance of sleep. Both of the hosts agree that sleep is a very important part of taking care of yourself, but Andrew even **goes out on a limb** and says that it is the best thing a person can do for self-care.

**To go out on a limb** means to take a risk. One theory about the origin of this expression is that it refers to climbing trees. A limb is a tree branch, so **to go out on a limb** literally means to climb on a possibly unsafe part of the tree.

We often say that we're **going out on a limb** if we're about to take a guess without a lot of evidence or to make a bold statement. For example, if all of your friends are huge Marvel movie fans, you would be **going out on a limb** if you told them that you didn't like the new Dr. Strange movie.

When you risk criticism in order to help another person, you could say that you are **going out on a limb** for them. For instance, someone could say, "I can't believe you **went out on a limb** for Carl and defended him."

Here are a couple more examples with **to go out on a limb**:

**Jennifer:** Hey, George. Thank you for your support during that meeting.

**George:** Of course, Jennifer. Everything you said was true. Management really needs to do a better job of distributing tasks so we can all have a better work-life balance.

**Jennifer:** Absolutely. The boss didn't look very happy when I brought that up, but I think it helped a lot when you spoke up and agreed with me. Thank you again for **going out on a limb** for me.

**George:** No thanks needed. Workers need to support each other!

**Victor:** I thought that presidential candidate debate was really interesting. The senator did a great job explaining his plans to create more jobs. He's got my vote.

**Wendy:** You thought so? I don't know ... I'm going **to go out on a limb** here and say that I was totally unimpressed. His climate change policy seemed pretty poor and he didn't do a very good job elaborating on social issues.

**Victor:** I suppose that's true, but the most important issue to me is economic policy.

## Love-hate relationship

Noun

After chatting about the importance of sleep, Kassy and Andrew talk about another great way to maintain your physical health—exercise. However, Kassy says that she has a **love-hate relationship** with exercise. This is because thinking about getting started stresses her out, but she feels great once she's actually exercising.

Having a **love-hate relationship** usually means that you have mixed feelings about someone. There are times when you love this person and times when you hate them. You can use this term to describe someone you feel very different emotions about, but you should not use it for someone you neither like nor dislike. For example, you might have a **love-hate relationship** with your sister if you get along really well some days but get into terrible arguments other days. However, you wouldn't describe your relationship with an acquaintance you feel neutral about as a **love-hate relationship**.

As we see in Kassy's example about exercise, we sometimes use the term **love-hate relationship** to talk about places, things, or activities. For instance, you might have a **love-hate relationship** with cooking if you feel inspired and excited to cook on the weekend but hate doing it on a weeknight after work.

Here are a couple more examples with **love-hate relationship**:

**Nicole:** Hey, Matty, how was dinner with your mom last night?

**Matty:** It went really well, actually! I think I have a bit of a **love-hate relationship** with my mom because we're both really opinionated and we have the opposite political beliefs. Luckily, though, politics didn't come up and we just chatted about work. She was really supportive about my decision to change jobs.

**Nicole:** That's great to hear. I know you two tend to argue a lot, but it's also clear how much she loves you.

**Joe:** Are you excited for the conference in New York City next week?

**Brenda:** Uh, kind of. To be honest, I think I have a **love-hate relationship** with big cities. It'll be really nice to enjoy the good food and the nightlife, but I can't stand seeing garbage on the streets and smelling the sewers. I might scream if I see a rat in the subway!

**Joe:** Yeah. I agree. Life in our small town can be pretty boring, but at least we've got plenty of fresh air!

## To take full advantage of Expression

While discussing physical self-care, Kassy brings up paying for body care services like massages, nail care, or hair care. She says that this is very popular in Thailand where she lives, so she has been **taking full advantage of** the availability of these services.

**To take full advantage of** something means to use a situation or resource to the fullest extent. We often say this when the situation or resource is rare or will only last for a limited time. For instance, you might say, "I'm only staying in Hawaii for a week, so I plan **to take full advantage of** the beautiful weather while I'm there. I want to go surfing every single day!" You might also say, "My company gives its workers generous paid time off, so I **take full advantage of** that every year and go on long trips to different countries."

**To take full advantage of** is generally used in a positive way. However, if you drop the "full" and use a person as the object of the sentence, this expression can mean to treat a person in a weaker position badly for your own benefit. For instance, a bully might **take advantage of** a shy but smart student and force her to do his homework for him.

Here are a few more examples with **to take full advantage of**:

**Lois:** Tomorrow is my first day off in 2 weeks!

**Bruce:** Great! What are you going to do?

**Lois:** I'm planning on **taking full advantage of** my day off. First, I'll go on a 5-mile run in the morning. Then I'm going to tidy up the house since it's gotten so messy recently. Finally, I want to do some meal prep for the week and practice the violin.

**Bruce:** Sounds like it's going to be a productive day off. Don't forget to do some relaxing, too!

**Lois:** Ha, I'll try to fit that in!

**Yvonne:** How was your trip to Tokyo, Adam?

**Adam:** It was spectacular. I had an amazing time. My hotel was very luxurious and I **took full advantage of** being by the ocean and ate fresh, delicious seafood every day!

**Yvonne:** Oh, that sounds wonderful. I wish I could have gone with you!

**Adam:** Me too. Maybe the next time my company has a conference, I can try and **take advantage of** my airline mileage rewards and get you a discounted plane ticket!

## Band-aid

Noun

At the very end of the episode, Andrew and Kassy bring up the idea of treating yourself as a form of self-care. Kassy decides that treating yourself with a big slice of chocolate cake or buying yourself a gift can sometimes be a good form of self-care, but it's kind of like putting a **band-aid** on a big cut.

A **band-aid** is a small, sticky bandage that you put on a cut to protect it and keep it clean. We also use this term figuratively for something that temporarily solves or helps a situation but does not fix the root cause of the problem. We can call something a **band-aid** (for example, "That idea is just a **band-aid** for the student debt crisis") or use **band-aid** as a compound noun, such as a **band-aid** solution or a **band-aid** fix. For example, a programmer may quickly design a **band-aid** solution for a design flaw while he works on figuring out how to fix the root problem.

When it comes to self-care, **band-aid** solutions can help, but it's important to address the root cause of your problems if you can!

Here are a few more examples with **band-aid**:

**Jason:** What do you think of Jennifer's suggestion about making the distribution of tasks fairer around the office?

**Anika:** It's a step in the right direction, but I think it's just a **band-aid** solution. The real problem is that we need to hire more staff. Even if all of our work were distributed equally, I'd still be working overtime.

**Jason:** Good point. The biggest issue is that we're incredibly short-staffed.

**Aidan:** Brittany and I made up yesterday.

**Zoey:** Really? What happened?

**Aidan:** I went over to her house with a bouquet of flowers and apologized.

**Zoey:** Did you talk about being more communicative with each other in the future?

**Aidan:** Uh, not really. She just cried a little and then we made up.

**Zoey:** Come on, you two have a fight like this every other week. Giving her flowers and apologizing is just a **band-aid** on your relationship. You two need to communicate better.

## Quiz

1. **If your job has been taking a toll on you this week, that means it \_\_\_\_\_.**
  - a) has been making you feel inspired and energized
  - b) has been making you feel exhausted and burned out
  - c) has been using up a lot of your time
  - d) has been very easy for you to do
  
2. **If your spouse asks “Can we squeeze in a hike this weekend?” they are asking \_\_\_\_\_.**
  - a) if you can find some time in your busy schedule to go hiking
  - b) if you can go on a hike with very narrow trails
  - c) if hiking sounds like a fun activity
  - d) if you would like to try hiking for the first time
  
3. **Your friend asks you to go out on a limb for her and recommend her for a position at your workplace. In other words, she wants you to \_\_\_\_\_.**
  - a) tell a lie
  - b) brag about her work experience
  - c) be a good employee
  - d) take a risk
  
4. **What is NOT a good example of taking full advantage of something?**
  - a) using all of your paid sick days each year
  - b) living in New York City and only eating at one restaurant
  - c) going to the beach every day during your vacation to Hawaii
  - d) installing solar panels on the roof of your house in Southern California
  
5. **Your side-view mirror was knocked off of your car in a traffic accident. You decided to reattach it with duct tape while you save up money to go to an auto repair shop. This is an example of a \_\_\_\_\_.**
  - a) gauze solution
  - b) first-aid solution
  - c) band-aid solution
  - d) permanent solution

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## Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What is your favorite way to relax after a difficult week?
2. Do you find exercise to be a chore or a joy? Do you have a love-hate relationship with working out? Please explain why exercise is or isn't a good form of self-care for you.
3. Do you think that spirituality can be an effective form of self-care? Have you ever practiced self-care through spirituality or religion? Do you know anyone who has? Please describe.
4. Do you think self-care is a band-aid solution or does it address and solve the root cause of your problems? Please explain your opinion.
5. If you had an entire week off to spend on yourself—no work, no responsibilities—what would you do?

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## Quiz Answers

1.b    2.a    3.d    4.b    5.c

### Episode credits

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