Self-Care Goals

Anxiety and depression affect behaviour (what you do), and behaviours (activities) affect mood. The following areas are worth considering for setting goals, as they are all areas that research has shown to impact mental health.

1. Sleep

- Not getting enough sleep affects both physical and mental health.
- Look at your daily habits. Keep a regular bedtime and wake-up time. Wind down before bed. Avoid caffeine late in the day.
- If you have insomnia — trouble falling asleep, or staying asleep — you can work on it. CBTi is a short therapy that teaches skills to improve sleep. CBTi stands for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia.
- Some options to work on CBTi: workbooks like “Sink Into Sleep”, or a CBTi group, such as the one I am running.

2. Exercise

- A lot of research shows that regular vigorous exercise helps with depression and anxiety. Ideally, it would be a minimum of 150 minutes per week.
- Aerobic exercise is activity that makes your heart beat faster and your breathing harder. Examples are brisk walking, running, cycling, and swimming. It helps to find a type of exercise you will enjoy.
- You can start small if you are not exercising at all right now. Even just a 10-minute walk is a good start.
- See the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology guidelines for adults aged 18 to 64: https://csepguidelines.ca/guidelines/adults-18-64/

3. Diet

- Eating a healthier diet has been shown to help with depression.
- Use the Canada Food Guide plate model. It shows half the plate as vegetables and fruit. One quarter is healthy protein, and one quarter should be whole grains. Every meal doesn’t have to resemble that plate; it is just a guide for your overall intake of food for the day.
- Healthy proteins include legumes (beans, lentils, chickpeas), fish, chicken, eggs, and tofu. Whole grains include brown rice, oats, quinoa, buckwheat, and whole wheat bread.
- A good aim to work toward: if 90% of what you eat fits this plate model, that is ideal. You do not need to be perfect. Ideally aim to minimize fried foods, things with sugar, and junk food.
- Small steps help. Add one vegetable to a meal. Drink water instead of a sweet drink.

4. Substances — drugs and alcohol

- Alcohol and drugs can feel calming in the short term. But drug or alcohol addiction often worsens mental health problems.
- Consider cutting down, or ideally stopping the use of drugs and alcohol.
- If you find you cannot cut down on your own, get help. Talk to your doctor, or join a 12 step group.

5. Mindfulness

- Mindfulness is the state of being focused on the present moment, aware of your experiences in an open, curious, non-judging way.
- Research has shown that mindfulness training helps reduce anxiety and depression.
- You can develop more mindfulness in 2 ways: meditating, or doing daily activities with a mindful focus.

6. Socializing

- Depression or anxiety can lead to isolation, but being isolated then worsens mental health.
- We tend to thrive more, and cope better with problems, when we have relationships with people that feel close, connected and supportive.
- Consider if you want to work on this area. You might want to do activities that allow you to meet people, or you might want to contact people you haven’t spoken to in a while.