People in America do not take enough you-time.

Birchbox study reveals many people feel guilty when they do make time to care for themselves.
The art of taking time for yourself.

We asked people living in America about their attitudes and behaviors towards self-care – a subject sparking debate around everything from managing our physical and mental health to changing how we work, date and parent.

While “self-care” is not a foreign notion to people in America, the realities and pressures of everyday life mean not many are able to consistently make time for themselves. But when they do, Americans are choosing activities that help nurture their bodies, mind and soul.

A new survey by Birchbox, conducted by Kelton Global, reveals that for many people in America, a duty to others gets in the way of “me-time.” Many are haunted by the feeling of guilt when they do try to sneak a moment for themselves. But the truth is, self-care is just what’s needed to help overcommitted and overwhelmed Americans re-energize. Perhaps this is why people are willing to make trade-offs and compromises in their lives, such as skipping out on social activities like happy hour or date night, to take back some time for themselves.
Small acts of “me-time”

People in America know self-care, but not many prioritize it... The term self-care is universally familiar to almost all people, as 98 percent have heard the word. But fewer than two in five (35%) people are consistently and routinely making the time to practice self-care. The majority (62%) are approaching self-care in a more sporadic fashion, such as trying to make time whenever they can or doing so once in a blue moon.

- More men than women say they consistently make time for self-care (39% vs. 32%).
- Those who are single are more likely to regularly make time for self-care than those who are married or in a relationship (42% vs. 30%).

One way people practice self-care is through their beauty and grooming ritual. And while many admit they are willing to invest more time in their routine when the social stakes are high, their usual routine doesn’t get the attention it deserves outside of such infrequent special occasions. Instead, the everyday reality is that many are multitasking during their beauty and grooming routines, and sometimes even skip it altogether because of life getting in the way.
… even though they know it’s the little things that count. The majority of people (89%) know that even just a few minutes of “me-time” can make a world of difference. But the reality is two in five (40%) feel they rarely have time for themselves each day. Perhaps that’s why three in ten (30%) go so far as to make calendar appointments to block off time for themselves.

- Almost half of city/urban-dwellers agree they rarely have time to care for themselves (45%). This is more than those living in the suburbs (36%) or those living in small town/rural areas (39%) who feel the same.

- Parents are more likely to feel they don’t have time to self-care than those without kids (45% vs. 32%).

- Men are more likely than women to block off time for themselves in their calendars (34% vs. 26%).

only 30% of people in America are making time for self-care.
For most, self-care is centered on their bodies.

More Americans consider self-care to mean taking care of their bodies (74%) than taking a break to recharge (57%) or even pampering themselves (50%). This focus on their bodies may be the reason why the same number (74%) associate fitness and exercise activities with self-care.

- Moms are more likely than dads to see taking care of their bodies (76% vs. 68%) or pampering themselves (58% vs. 45%) as self-care.

- Those who are straight are more likely than those in the LGBTQ community to consider pampering themselves to be self-care (51% vs. 40%).

- Men are more likely to associate fitness and exercise with self-care than women (77% vs. 70%).
Others equate self-care with grooming rituals.

It's not just physical fitness that Americans think of when it comes to self-care. An almost equal number (72%) also associate beauty or grooming rituals with it. Specifically, taking a bubble bath or hot shower (50%), carrying out their beauty or grooming routine (37%), having a spa day (30%), getting a manicure or pedicure (30%), or putting on a face mask (21%). Even their usual post-shower routine, like air-drying or moisturizing, counts as a self-care activity (30%).

• Younger generations (18-38) are more likely than older generations (39+) to link beauty and grooming rituals to self-care (77% vs. 69%).

• African Americans more so than any other ethnicity associate beauty or grooming rituals with self-care (82% vs. 70%).
Ordinary “me-time” matters in the grand scheme of self-care.

When it comes to their self-care philosophy, most Americans appreciate being able to have alone time (63%) and doing something for themselves every day (53%). Perhaps this is why three in four (75%) Americans look for small opportunities to treat themselves.

• Younger generations (18-38) are more likely than their older counterparts (39+) to see alone time as a form of self-care (67% vs. 61%).

• Older generations (39+) are more likely than those younger (18-38) to take pleasure in finding small opportunities to treat themselves (78% vs. 71%).

And small moments reserved just for “me-time” can go a long way.

Taking advantage of the little moments for themselves may be why the most popular self-care activities, aside from exercise, are: listening to music or a podcast (59%), taking a nap (57%), prayer or meditation (56%), enjoying their favorite foods or beverages (52%), watching TV (51%) or reading a book (47%). Others say that time spent on a hobby or passion project (48%) or cooking (35%) are ways to take care of oneself. And nearly a third (31%) even associate self-care with having sex!

• Moms are more likely than dads to equate self-care with taking a nap (64% vs. 47%).

• More people from older generations (39+) link prayer and meditation with self-care than younger generations (18-38) (59% vs. 53%).

• Men are more likely than women to consider having sex as a form of self-care (38% vs. 24%).

• Parents are more likely to associate having sex with self-care than those without children (33% vs. 27%).
While many connect ‘doing’ activities with the act of self-care, nearly two in five (39%) define self-care as practicing mindfulness and focusing on the present moment. That may be why three in ten (30%) say unplugging from technology is how they self-care. In fact, the average American admits that in a typical week, they have two hours of digital detox time.

- Older generations (39+) are more likely than their younger counterparts (18-38) to consider unplugging from technology to be a form of self-care (32% vs. 28%).

- Westerners are more likely than other regions of the U.S.A. to say a digital detox is a form of self-care (37% vs. 28%).
Putting duty ahead of oneself.

Americans are feeling overcommitted and overwhelmed. Three in five (60%) Americans agree they often feel overwhelmed by everything that needs to be done. And almost as many (51%) admit they tend to feel burnt out quite often.

- Gen Zers (76%), Millennials (67%), and Gen Xers (68%) are more likely to feel overwhelmed than Boomers+ (47%).

- And Gen Zers specifically are most likely to feel burnt out (73%), followed by Millennials (57%) and Gen Xers (54%), while Boomers+ (39%) are less likely to share that feeling.

- Moms, as compared to dads, are more likely to feel both overwhelmed (66% vs. 53%) and burnt out (54% vs. 43%).

- Those who are married or in a relationship are more likely to feel overwhelmed than those who are not (64% vs. 55%).
Many are left wanting more “me-time” but feel guilty to take the plunge.

Over two-thirds (67%) of people in America wish they spent more time taking care of themselves. But a third (33%) admit they feel guilty for taking the time to self-care. In fact, just over one in five (21%) have let their own guilt get in the way of some “me-time”.
relaxation balm

The internet generation is feeling more overwhelmed.

- 76% Gen Z
- 68% Gen X
- 67% Millennials
- 47% Boomers
• Gen Xers more so than any other generation wish they spent more time taking care of themselves (77% vs. 64%).

• Those who live in cities or urban areas are more likely to wish they spent more time taking care of themselves than those in the suburbs or more rural areas (73% vs. 65%).

• Parents are more likely than those without kids to wish they spent more time taking care of themselves (71% vs. 63%).

• Parents are also more likely than non-parents to admit they feel guilty when they do take time for self-care (39% vs. 26%).

• Those who are in relationships, more so than those who aren’t, admit they feel guilty when they take time to care for themselves (39% vs. 27%).

• Those in the LGBTQ community are more likely than those who are straight to feel guilty taking time to care for themselves (43% vs. 32%).
There are plenty of responsibilities that make “me-time” hard to come by.

Two-thirds (67%) of Americans say they put others ahead of themselves. Work (31%), caring for their family members (28%), commitments like volunteering or studying (22%), and social engagements (17%) are some of the responsibilities that stand in the way of “me-time”.

- Men are more likely than women to let work (38% vs. 25%) or social engagements (22% vs. 12%) get in the way of self-care.
- Those who live in cities or urban areas are more likely than those who live in suburban or rural areas to let work interfere with self-care (38% vs. 28%).
- Higher earners (income of 100K+) are also more likely than their lower income counterparts to put work ahead of themselves (44% vs. 29%).
- Younger generations (18-38) are more likely than older generations (39+) to let social engagements get in the way of self-care (22% vs. 13%).

Americans are willing to trade social outings for time with themselves.

Over four in five (84%) Americans reveal they are willing to cancel plans to give some time back to themselves. Over half of those aged 21+ (52%) would skip happy hour. About a third would sacrifice going out with friends (35%) or ticketed events such as live shows, movies or concerts (31%). Some Americans will even pass on sex (24%) or a date night with their significant other (19%) to take care of themselves instead.

- Men are more likely than women to be willing to say no to social engagements in exchange for some time for themselves (87% vs. 81%).
- Specifically, more men than women will skip time out with friends (39% vs. 32%) or ticketed events (35% vs. 27%) to reclaim time for themselves.
- Almost twice as many women will forego sex to have more time for themselves than men (30% vs. 18%).
Making the most of their beauty and grooming time Americans believe that appearances do matter.

Over two in five (42%) Americans admit they care about what people think of them. This means that a similar number (41%) say they invest time and effort into their appearance. In fact, 43 percent say they feel uncomfortable leaving the house without finishing their beauty or grooming routine.

- Younger generations (18-38) are more likely than older generations (39+) to put a lot of time and effort into their appearance (46% vs. 38%).

- African Americans are more likely than any other ethnicity to say they put a lot of time and effort into their appearance (52% vs. 39%).

- Those in the Northeast admit they feel uncomfortable leaving the house without finishing their beauty or grooming routine more so than those who live in other parts of the country (49% vs. 41%).
Sometimes they need to amp-up their beauty or grooming routine to impress others in their social circles.

Twice as many Americans say the top scenario that would make them spend more time on their beauty or grooming routine involves a social element (66%), as compared to when it’s just for themselves (34%). Among the top three scenarios are special events (58%), seeing people they haven’t seen in a long time (36%) and trying to impress a partner or date (32%).

- Women are more likely than men to spend more time in front of the mirror if they are seeing people they haven’t seen in a long time (40% vs. 33%).

- Men are more likely than women to spend more time on their grooming routine if they are trying to impress a partner or a date (37% vs. 28%).

- Almost twice as many people from older generations (39+), are willing to spend more time on their routines if they are seeing people who they haven’t in a long time than younger generations (18-38) (43% vs. 24%).

- Those who are single are more likely to spend more time on their routine when they’re trying to impress a partner or date than those who are married (37% vs. 28%).
And looking good can also give Americans an edge in the workplace.

Over one in four (26%) of employed Americans say preparing for an important presentation or meeting is one of the top three situations when they would spend more time perfecting their appearance.

- Men, as opposed to women, are more likely to spend extra time on their grooming routine to prepare for an important presentation or meeting (33% vs. 20%).
Other times, Americans are forced to multitask their way through their routine to make the most of their day.

Just over two in three (67%) Americans admit to doing something else at the same time as their beauty or grooming routine. For these people, most (58%) are cleaning the house or cooking a meal (49%) while they beautify and groom themselves. And among multitasking pet owners, one in five (20%) confess they’ve walked the dog at the same time.

- Those who live in cities or urban areas are more likely to multitask while performing their beauty or grooming routine than those who live in suburban or rural areas (76% vs. 63%).
Others will socialize during their beauty and grooming rituals.

Among the people who are multitasking, some are using this time to catch-up on their social life, such as talking with friends or neighbors (34%), or face-timing a friend (23%). Others admit they have been caught off-guard in the middle of their routine, needing to answer the door for a delivery person (30%) or having to entertain an unexpected guest (18%).

• Younger generations (18-38) are more likely than their older counterparts (39+) to have facetime with a friend while in the middle of their beauty or grooming routine (32% vs. 17%).

• Men are more likely than women to have had to entertain an unexpected guest while in the middle of their grooming routine (22% vs. 15%).

• Those who live in the suburbs (22%) are more likely to have entertained an unexpected guest than those in a city (18%) or rural areas (14%).
Some even make it public.

Some multitaskers take their routines on the road, with nearly two in five (38%) saying they’re doing their beauty or grooming routine at the same time as driving (26%), while they’re taking public transportation (13%) or even on a plane (11%).

• Men are more likely than women to have performed their beauty or grooming routine while traveling (42% vs. 34%).

• Parents are more likely than those without kids to have done their beauty or grooming routine on-the-go (41% vs. 33%).
Almost all (87%) Americans confess to skipping their beauty or grooming regime for one reason or another. Among those who have skipped their routine, feeling too tired (63%) and not having enough time (56%) are the two top reasons for neglecting it. Other reasons include needing to attend to chores (35%), work (32%), unexpected nights away from home (28%), or needing to care for family (26%). Just over a third (34%) of parents say taking care of their kids has meant they’ve had to skip their routines. For those who are married or in a relationship, one in five (19%) have passed over their beauty or grooming because they don’t feel the need to impress anyone.

- Women are more likely than men to have skipped their beauty or grooming routine because they were too tired (68% vs. 57%) or had chores to do (38% vs. 31%).

- Men are more likely than women to have skipped their routine for work (36% vs. 28%).

- Younger generations (18-38) are more likely than older generations (39+) to have skipped their routine due to lack of time (62% vs. 53%).
Although routines are simple, Americans are well-stocked with beauty and grooming products.

Four in five Americans (80%) agree that they have a simple beauty and grooming routine. But bathroom shelves may beg to differ. On average, American women regularly use thirteen beauty or grooming products. Almost all women are using body care (93%) and haircare (93%) products, and most are using makeup (82%), face-care (74%) and shaving products (68%) as well. In contrast, the average American man uses seven products.

- Nearly one in five (18%) men admit to using some sort of makeup products on the regular.
When it comes to beauty and grooming products, brand loyalty runs high.

Not only are deodorants, razors and shampoo/conditioners the most used products, they’re also the ones where people have the longest-running relationships with their favorite brands. On average, deodorant users have been using their favorite brand for four and a half years. And razor and shampoo/conditioner users have had nearly four-year relationships with their favorite brands.

- Men are more likely than women to have had long-lasting relationships with their razor brands. Men report using their favorite brand for four years, while women have stuck with their brand for three years.

- And men are also more likely to stick with the same brands of shampoo/conditioner than women. Men report using their favorite shampoo/conditioner brand for four years, while women have used theirs for three years.
Beauty: a trend & fun category for women.

Only about a third (34%) of women admit they stay on top of all the latest beauty trends. However, nearly twice as many women (67%) say they shop for beauty products because it is fun to play with new products and experiment with trends. In fact, 25 percent of women list creating a new look or style for themselves as a top three scenario in which they would spend more time on their beauty and grooming routines.

Using products across gender lines.

Americans are willing to experiment. Over half (53%) of Americans say they are comfortable using a product that is marketed to another gender.

• Younger generations (18-38) are more likely than older generations (39+) to feel comfortable using products that are marketed to another gender (62% vs. 49%).

• Those who are LGBTQ are more likely to feel comfortable using products that are marketed to another gender than those who are straight (66% vs. 52%).
Necessity of preference?

Over two in five (44%) have tried products that are marketed to another gender when staying over at their significant others’ place. Some Americans even confess that these products work better for their needs. Just over a third (36%) reveal that they find these products more effective than products which are marketed to their own gender.

- Men are more likely than women to find products that are marketed to another gender to be more effective for their needs (40% vs. 33%).

- Younger generations (18-38) are more likely than older generations (39+) to think products marketed to another gender are more effective (43% vs. 32%).

- More people who live in cities or urban areas have tried products that are marketed to a different gender when staying at a significant others’ place than those who live in suburban or rural areas (53% vs. 40%).

- Those who are a part of the LGBTQ community are more likely than those who are straight to find products which are marketed to another gender to be more effective (55% vs. 34%).
Too shy to buy.

Although they’re happy to use these products, over two in five (43%) admit they would never buy for themselves.

- Younger generations (18-38) are more likely than those aged 39+ to say they would never buy these products but are happy to use them (49% vs. 40%).

- Those from multicultural backgrounds are more likely than Caucasians to say that they have used products marketed to another gender, but they would not buy them (48% vs. 41%).
Subgroup Definitions

Younger generations (18-38), Older generations (39+),
Gen Zers (18-22) Millennials (23-38), Gen Xers (39-54),
Boomers+ (55+).

Methodological Notes

The study surveyed 1,070 people aged 18+ in the U.S. The survey was conducted online during the period of May 13th-17th, 2019. The study has a margin of error of +/- 3%. Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results.

In this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 3 percent, from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all personas in the universe represented by the sample. The margin of error for any subgroups will be slightly higher.

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