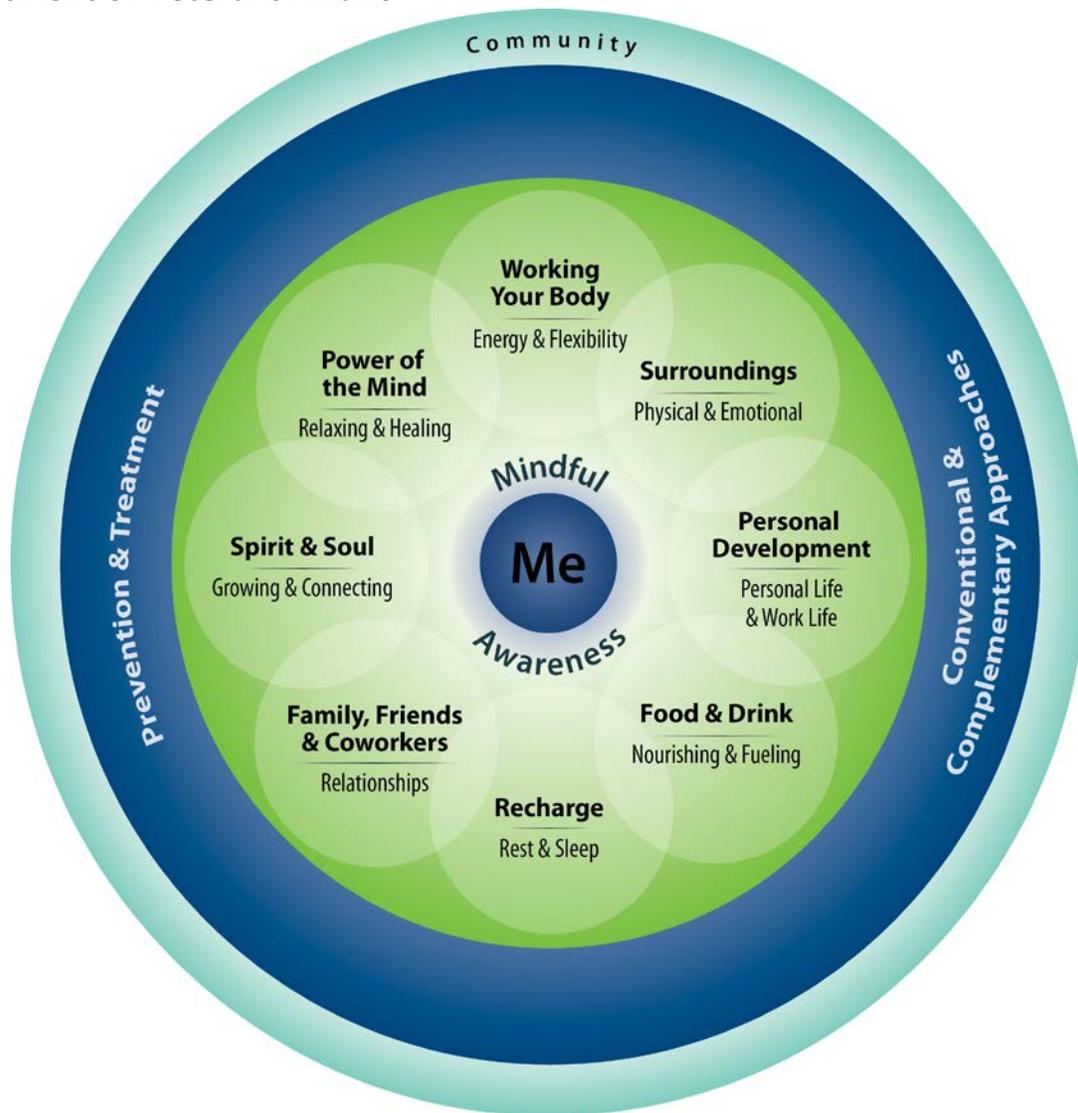


Whole Health

A Guide to Proactive Living and Well-Being

VA Puget Sound Health Care System
Department of Veterans Affairs



This class was inspired by materials developed through the VA Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation. We have used the Circle of Health as the foundational structure for the class and have put together materials from a variety of sources. We have tried as much as possible to use VA materials and provide references to materials from other sources we have borrowed. We have also developed our own materials when needed.

This workbook is intended for use within the VA and it is suitable for use with Veterans as well as for staff as a well-being program. We have developed it for use in a group format, but could be used in one on one counseling, or even as a self-study program. It is not intended to replace ongoing medical treatment, but rather to add on to existing treatment. It is not designed for specific diagnoses or conditions, but rather as a program to enhance whole health and well-being. While it has been developed by mental health clinicians working in primary care, it is not intended as a mental health intervention, but strives to provide an alternative view of health that is not reduced to diagnosis or specialty, but rather puts the Veteran in the center of care with an emphasis on empowerment & personal responsibility, and supports lifelong learning for optimal health and wellness.

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Primary Care Mental Health Integration

Seattle Division

VA Puget Sound HCS

Department of Veteran Affairs

Revised June, 2016

If you have problems or questions about your health, talk to your doctor.

For any crisis, call Veteran Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255

Welcome to the Whole Health Class

This is a 9-week class that Veterans can join at any time. Throughout the class we will focus on different ways to help each other improve our health. By “health” we mean health in all areas of life – our physical, social, emotional, and spiritual selves.

Every class will focus on a different topic that relates to our health such as Working Your Body, Surroundings, Personal Development, Food & Drink, Sleep Improvement, Social relationships, Spirit & Soul, and Power of the Mind.

In addition to the topic of the day, we will focus on two skills throughout the class.

- The first skill is **Mindfulness**, to be in the present with our thoughts, emotions, and experiences.
- The second skill is “**Just Do It**”, where we put our ideas into action to make our lives more meaningful and improve health. We encourage the spirit of Yoda from Star Wars, “The Empire Strikes Back” when he says, “Do. Or do not. There is no try.”
- “**Take it Outside!**” We encourage you to try this at home.

Introduction to Group Norms

Before we begin, we would like to take a moment to talk about some ground rules for our discussion. What do you think would be important to maintain safety within this group?

- Confidentiality
- Peer respect
- Stay on topic
- Encourage others to share
- Be sensitive with trauma-related stories

Whole health Community – Continuing the Conversation

Part of making changes in your life is having a community that is also interested in making positive changes. We encourage group members to use each other for support. That may include exchanging phone numbers to check-in about progress or asking questions. After group, the members are welcome to meet in the Canteen to continue the conversation.

What is a SMART goal?

A SMART goal is one that is **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound**.



Specific: A Specific goal has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal. To be specific, your goal should be concrete and well-defined.

- What exactly do I want to do?
- Are there multiple steps?

Measurable: *Keeping track of progress gives incentives to keep going. A goal should have criteria you can use to track your progress and determine success.*

- How will I know when I've accomplished my goal?

Attainable: While your goal may be challenging and require you to stretch, attainable goals are not extreme. Also, make sure you have the time and resources to reach your goal.

- Can I accomplish my goal with the energy or resources I have?

Relevant: *When you identify goals that are most important to you, you begin to figure out ways you can make them come true. To keep your goals relevant, make sure they are focused in the direction you want to go in your life.*

- Will this goal help me move forward in my life?

Time-Bound: A time-bound goal is intended to establish a sense of urgency and prevent goals from being overtaken by the day-to-day distractions. **A deadline will help you stay motivated.**

- Are there things I can do to keep myself on track?

My Goal: _____

Class 1: Working the Body: Energy & Flexibility



Our bodies are made for movement. This means moving your body: walking, dancing, gardening, sports, bowling, yoga, cycling, swimming, and playing with grandchildren.

We are our bodies and they are our vehicles for adventure in the world. They help us live our lives to their full potential. Without movement we start to develop problems: pain, depression, diabetes, high blood pressure, insomnia, and anxiety. Moving your body helps build Energy and increase Flexibility.

Movement can be medicine; it is the very expression of the body.

To improve my energy and flexibility, I want to work on:_____

Interaction of Mind and Body

What you do with your mind influences the health of your body – and vice versa too! Movement helps with depression and learning as well as improving your physical health. Movement outside with your body helps movement inside (your mind, heart and blood sugar, as well as your bowels!).

Why is movement important to you?

- Why should we move?
- What do you want movement for in your life?
- What are the obstacles to movement?
- What would you like to be able to do with your body?

Video: Taiwanese Motorcycle Riders: “What Do People Live For?”

[Google Search Videos: “Dream Rangers”](#)



Pain & Your Body

Pain is a common experience for Veterans and all people. Pain is your body’s way of communicating information to you. You can use pain as a way of being in your body and communicating with your body. Many people just want pain to stop or pain to go away, but that means you are no longer listening to your body and no longer

allowing it to communicate with you. Here are just a couple ways of working and thinking about pain:

- *Your mental state* effects your perception of pain – work on your attitude and outlook, ask for help if you need it.
- *Pain and suffering are two different things*, you may not be able to change the pain you are in, but you can change the amount of suffering you have from it!
- *Movement increases blood flow and flexibility* and this can decrease pain. Ask your doctor what kinds of movement are safe to do. Yoga, Tai Chi, stretching, walking, and swimming or water aerobics are all low-impact exercises that can increase blood flow and flexibility and decrease pain.
- If you have chronic pain it will hurt more, not less, if you sit still. Acute pain needs rest, but chronic pain needs movement. Pain medicine has its limitations and can cause side effects. More and more the VA is realizing that more medication is not the answer to pain – look at how you can *add the medicine of movement into your self-care*.

The Health Risks of Sitting “Sitting is the New Smoking”

- Cardiovascular health problems
- Weight gain
- Low mood



Mindfulness Practice: *Standing Mindfulness*

Please sit comfortably with your feet on the floor. Take three deep breaths. With each breath, see how far down into your belly you can draw your breath. Notice, is there movement in your sitting or is it just stillness?

Without moving, imagine in your mind all the small movements you would have to do in order to slowly rise from seated to standing. Imagine all the muscles and joints you would have to move, just to go from sitting to standing. This is the first step of any movement, activating your mind and imagination. You move for a reason and the movement starts in your mind.

We will break down this simple standing movement into a number of steps.

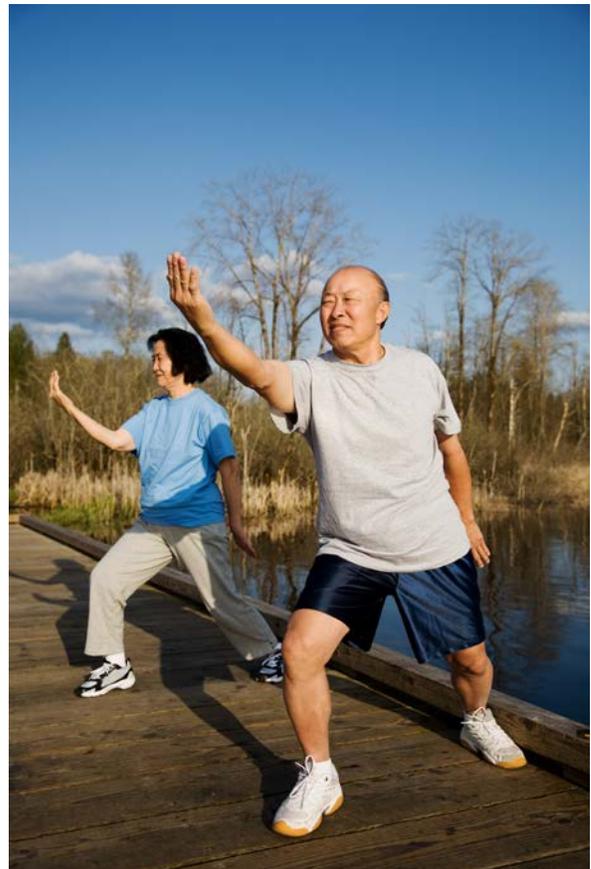
What is the first step of physical movement?

What is the next step?

And the next step?

What is it like to stand? How is it different or similar to sitting? How does it compare to the motions of standing?

Standing is the start of movement and movement is the basis of health. Just standing for a few minutes during a commercial break while watching TV, or for a few minutes every hour when you are working on the computer is something you can do for your body, energy & flexibility. We get energy by using our body and we grow in flexibility by stretching each day a little beyond our comfort zone.



My Health Goals

Strategies to help me increase energy and flexibility

Circle ONE strategy and set a goal:

- Household chores Gardening/yard work Walking Climbing stairs
 Grocery shopping Being physical at work Sports Yoga
 Walking the dog Golf Playing with (grand) children
 Going to the gym Martial Arts/Tai Chi Stretching Hiking
 Taking photographs Horseback Riding Museum Beach
 Take a class Volunteer Make art Fly a kite
 Dancing Play outdoor game Weight lifting Running

My goal for the next week is: (SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time Bound. Example: I will walk at least 3 times this week for 15 minutes each, after I get home from work.)

Things that might get in my way: (Examples: weather, pain, time)

What I can do to overcome these things: (Examples: exercise indoors, walk with a friend)

I believe I can reach my goal: (Circle the number that matches how confident you feel.)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at All Sure			Somewhat Sure				Very Sure		

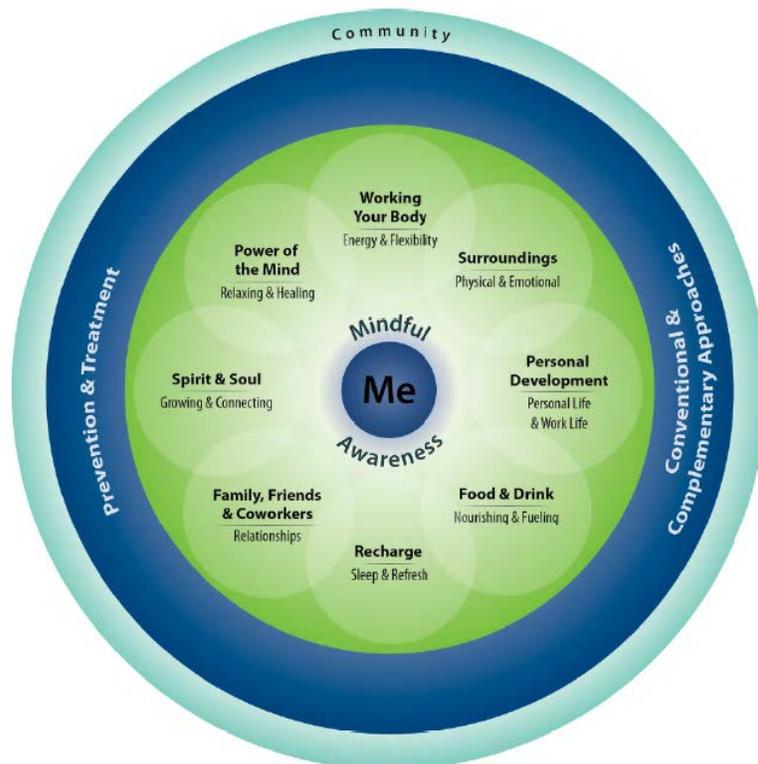
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Additional Resources to Work your Body:

Videos

[Google Search Video: “Never, Ever Give Up”](#) - One Veteran’s transformation through yoga

“A Patient Centered Care Approach to Working Your Body”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4zdzDAorbA&feature=youtu.be>

Make Your Day Harder: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whPuRLil4c0>

MOVE!

VA Move Web Page: <http://www.move.va.gov/>

Move! Classes held at the VA

Move Up! Walking group held at VA Puget Sound

Occupational Therapy (OT) Referral

VA Puget Sound offers Yoga classes with an OT referral

Community Resources

Free Resources for Veterans through Give Back Yoga:

<http://givebackyoga.org/resources-for-veterans/> (including *Yoga Warriors* book by Beryl Bender Birch)

Join a gym (look for deals)

Start a walking group

Smart Phone Apps

Move: <https://mobile.va.gov/app/move-coach-mobile-mcm-coming-soon>

Use a Pedometer App* on your smart phone (you may have one factory loaded on your phone)

*A *pedometer* is a portable device that measures a person's physical activity level throughout the day.

Exercises to Try: If You Sit or Stand . . . MOVE! ®

Whether you're at work or at home, here are some ways to move your body while sitting and standing. You can ask your health care team to demonstrate these moves!

Neck – Head Tilt

With arms at sides and looking straight ahead, gently tilt head to the left, as if you were trying to lay your left ear on your left shoulder. You should feel a stretch but not pain. Carefully return to the starting position. Repeat to the right side. Hold 15–60 seconds on each side.

Arms – Biceps Curl

With arms at your sides, bend your elbows as if trying to touch the front of your shoulders with your fingers. Slowly lower to starting position. Repeat 8–12 times.

Shoulders – Overhead Press

Start with your hands at your shoulders, palms facing upwards; reach up toward the ceiling, keeping your arms close to your ears. Repeat 8–12 times.

Chest and Upper Back – Reaching Forward and Back

Sitting or standing upright, extend both arms forward, palms facing each other. Slowly bring hands together and reach forward, rounding the top of your back, with your chin to your chest. Now reverse this motion and reach behind you, squeezing your shoulder blades together, opening up your chest. Hold each stretch for 15–60 seconds.

Feet and Ankles – Heel/Toe Raise, Ankle Circle

Sit with both feet on the floor, lift both heels up, keeping your toes on the floor; gently lower to starting position. Now lift toes and front of feet, keeping your heels on the floor; then gently lower to starting position. Raise one foot and make a circle motion to the left and then to the right. Repeat with the other foot. Repeat 8–12 times.

Legs – Mini-Squat

While holding onto your chair for support, carefully squat down to a 45–90-degree angle at your knees, then tighten your buttocks and slowly stand up straight again. Repeat 8–12 times.

www.move.va.gov Page 2 of 2 *Physical Activity Handouts* • P10 Version 5.0

[Type text]

Class 2: Surroundings: Physical & Emotional



Creating a safe, comfortable, and healthy space starts when we develop an awareness of the things in our environment that influence our life and health: lighting, sounds, wall colors, houseplants, art, friendships, grandchildren, community.

Our environments are like our bodies or our selves in the world. Everything is connected and our environment will reflect and influence our inner state (e.g., mood, anxiety, feelings of calm...). So often we can feel like victims of our environments, but there is always something we can change for the better. Even prisoners in a cell can imagine a better place – this is not just fantasy, it is using the powers of the mind to shape our realities.

To improve my environment, I want to work on: _____

Interaction of Person and Environment

The places where you spend your time influence the health of your mind and body!

Spending time in an environment that feels relaxing, calm, peaceful, or energizing helps you to maintain your mental and physical health.

Paying attention to the quality of your environment (sounds, colors, temperature, cleanliness) can help you to identify simple things that can be changed to improve your overall well-being (paint colors, art, trash removal, wash dishes, tv/radio turned off).

Why is having a safe and comfortable space important to you?

- Why should we care about our environment?
- What could your environment do for you in your life?
- What is one change we could make to this room?
- What are the obstacles to creating change in our environments?

What do you notice about our current environment?

- What do you notice about this room (sights, sounds, colors, scents, lighting, temperature)?
- What are three things we could change to make this room more comfortable?

Let's Experiment

Add background music or ocean sounds

[Google Search Videos: "Calming ocean sounds"](#)

- Now what do you notice?
- How do the background sounds affect your mood or your comfort level in this room?

Add essential oils

- Now what do you notice?
- How do the scents affect your mood or your comfort level in this room?

Mindfulness Practice:

5-4-3-2-1 (see, hear, touch, smell, taste)

The point is to try and observe or to notice your experience of your environment.

“Close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so, or let them relax. Start by taking several slow, deep breaths.

Then take a few moments to notice 5 things you see....

Then notice 4 things that you feel physically....Then notice 3 things that you hear...

Then notice 2 things that you smell...and 1 thing that you taste....

Return your attention to your breath for a few moments, slowly open your eyes and return your attention to the room.”

6-3 Breathing Exercise

“Take a deep breath in to a count of 6 – hold for a count of 3

Now breathe out for a count of 6 – hold for a count of 3 (Repeat this for a few cycles)

Now breathe normally, notice the feeling of the air as it passes down your throat.

Feel the air as it glides in and out of your nose.

Let you abdomen (stomach) expand to take in a belly full of air.

Notice the touch of your clothes on your skin as your body expands and contracts with your breathing.”

Visualization Practice:

Use your imagination to create a calm inner environment. Recognize the influence of the outer environment on your inner calm.

“Close your eyes.

Imagine the busiest New York street, you hear car horns, taxis cramming the streets, pedestrians crowding the streets. Then notice what happens as you step through the heavy old oak doors of a church into the quiet and dim sanctuary beyond. Notice the candles flickering, the muted traffic sounds, and feel the calm descend.”



10 Simple Ways You Can Create A Healing Environment:

- 1) Sound (music, relaxing sounds, wind chimes)
- 2) Texture (blanket, wall hanging, scarf, window curtain)
- 3) Scent (essential oils, cleaners, incense, flowers)
- 4) Light (candles, lamps, pull back the curtains)
- 5) Color (page out of magazine, fabric, blanket)
- 6) Bring in Life (plants, fish tank)
- 7) Moving air (open the window, turn on a fan)
- 8) Art (make your own, buy from thrift shop, page from magazine)
- 9) Flowers (even a glass with dandelions adds life to your environment)
or,
- 10) Put on your favorite, comfortable clothes

Creating a personal sensory kit

What is a sensory kit?

- A container that holds items that are useful for coping and self-regulation
- The idea is to have items handy and available to use in the situations that are difficult
- Kits can take many forms, and they have many different themes or purposes

Theme

Identify a problem, symptom, or situation for which you could use a handy collection of sensory items for calming, alerting, or self-regulation. Such as, anxiety, stress at work, staying sober, sleep difficulties, car sickness or staying awake in the car, attention difficulties, negative thinking). *This will become your theme.* **Think about the problem and the times and places that it happens**

Style

Think about the ways you will use this kit and the places you will be when you will need to use it.

Consider the need for portability, discretion, the bulk of the items, and the convenience at work or bedside. Ideas include: heavy zip lock bag, plastic or other box, pencil case, shoe box, back pack...

Items

Think about things that you know work for you and try out new ideas...

Scented hand cream	Gum/chewy lollies	Koosh balls
Cedar filled mini pillow	Lollipops, hard candies	Small blanket
Stretch wrap	iPod/CD player and	Beanbag/stress ball
Crossword/Sudoku book	Relaxation music	Inspirational book
Poetry/favourite book	Magazines	Word games
Beautiful images/pictures	Pencil/paper (doodling)	Exercise bands

Water bottle Ice/heat pack Nature items Adult colouring book
Preferred scents Fidget toys Mini fan Chocolate Spicy snacks

Put your kit together and use!!!

Adapted from: The Sensory Connection Self-regulation Workbook: Learning to use sensory activities to manage stress, anxiety and emotional crisis. By Karen Moore (2008)



Take It Outside!

When you go home, take a few minutes, look around, find one thing you can do to create a healing environment. It could be adding a thing of beauty or life or it could be cleaning up a small spot.

My Health Goals

Strategies to help me improve my Surroundings:

Circle ONE strategy and set a goal:

- Buy a plant Paint a wall Hang pictures Thrift store art
- Take out the garbage Open a window shade Change the temperature
- Add personal objects/curios Hang photos/magazine photos Add color
- Use soft yellow lightbulbs Play music Buy a colorful rug
- Relaxing sounds Set up a cozy space Donate unused items
- Recycle old mail Put away laundry Move furniture Vacuum
- Cut out magazine photos Put tree branches or flowers in a vase
- Essential oils Scented pinecones/potpourri _____

My goal for the next week is: (SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time Bound. Example: I will walk at least 3 times this week for 15 minutes each, after I get home from work.)

Things that might get in my way: (Examples: weather, pain, time)

What I can do to overcome these things: (Examples: exercise indoors, walk with a friend)

I believe I can reach my goal: (Circle the number that matches how confident you feel.)

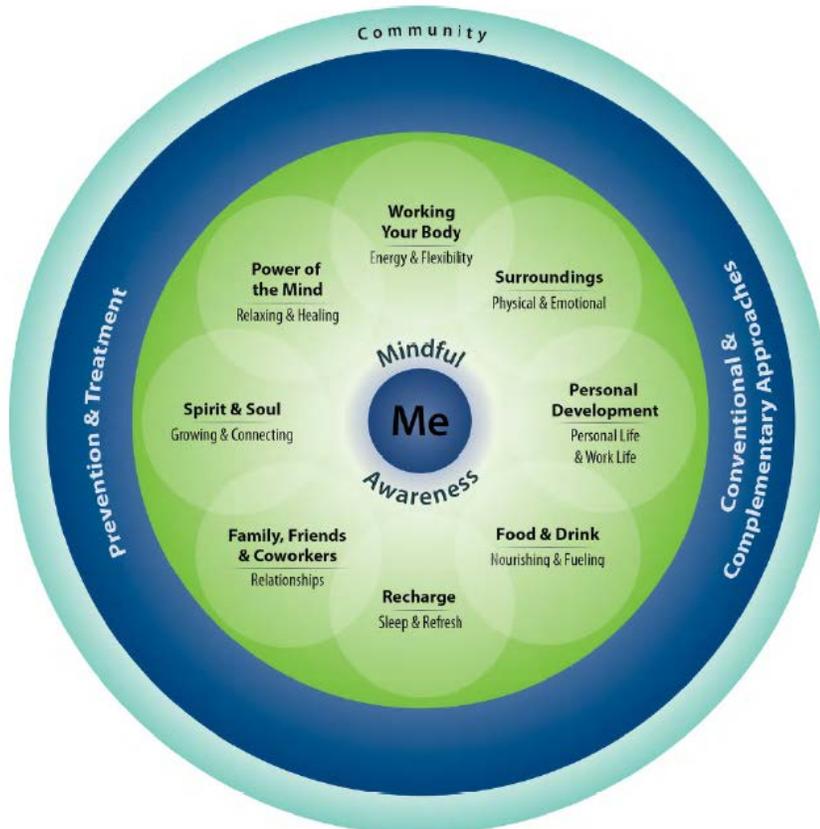
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My Progress Report

for week beginning:
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Goal:

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Additional Resources to Shape your Environment:

Strategies

Sensory Modulation – Create a Personal Sensory Kit that you can use to change your feelings and mood.

Feng shui – Ancient Chinese practice of creating a harmonious environment. You can look up books or websites on this practice.

Decluttering – “Creating order on the outside, creates order on the inside”

Music listening exercise – How you can use music to change your mood? Find different types of music that you find can create an environment that changes your mood.

Create a personal space or shrine: find a small space in your home, it could even be a small corner, find something of beauty or meaning to you and place it there. It could be a religious icon, a pebble from the beach, something meaningful from childhood – anything really. The important thing is creating a space for memory, reflection, devotion or inspiration.

Blog

Planetalk, Plane Tree blog that focuses on creating healing environments:
<http://planetree.org/planetalk/category/healingenvironments/>

Videos

Google search video: [“Discovering Art & Healing at VA”](#)

“Practicing What Matters Most: Creating Healing Environments for Women”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Gf8Rv6BF8M&feature=youtu.be>

Class 3: Personal Development Growing & Changing



As we bring our bodies into relationship with the environment we create our lives: learning, growing, changing, adapting, working, volunteering, family, community, church. What makes life meaningful is spending our time and energy during the day in ways that allow us to fully be ourselves.

To grow as a person, I want to work on: _____

Person in Process

How we spend our time can influence our development as a whole person! Maintaining an active lifestyle, sharing our talents with our community, and trying new things helps us to stay connected with all that life has to offer. Personal development in life is about balancing being true to core aspects of ourselves while also continually trying new things. We both remain the same while continually unfolding in the world. We learn to know ourselves through new experiences in the world. When our actions match our values they promote our happiness and good health! Being aware of what we value can help us to make intentional choices to do things that matter in life.

Values Card Sort

University of New Mexico Values Card Sort can be found here:

<http://casaa.unm.edu/inst/Personal%20Values%20Card%20Sort.pdf>

Using the values cards, pick your top 10 values, narrow to top 5, narrow to top 3.

How do your actions line up with your top 3 values?

Value 1: _____

Value 2: _____

Value 3: _____

The Goldilocks and the Three Bears Approach to Personal Development

In the story of Goldilocks, she went into the bears' house and the first bed was too soft, the next was too firm, the third was *just right*.

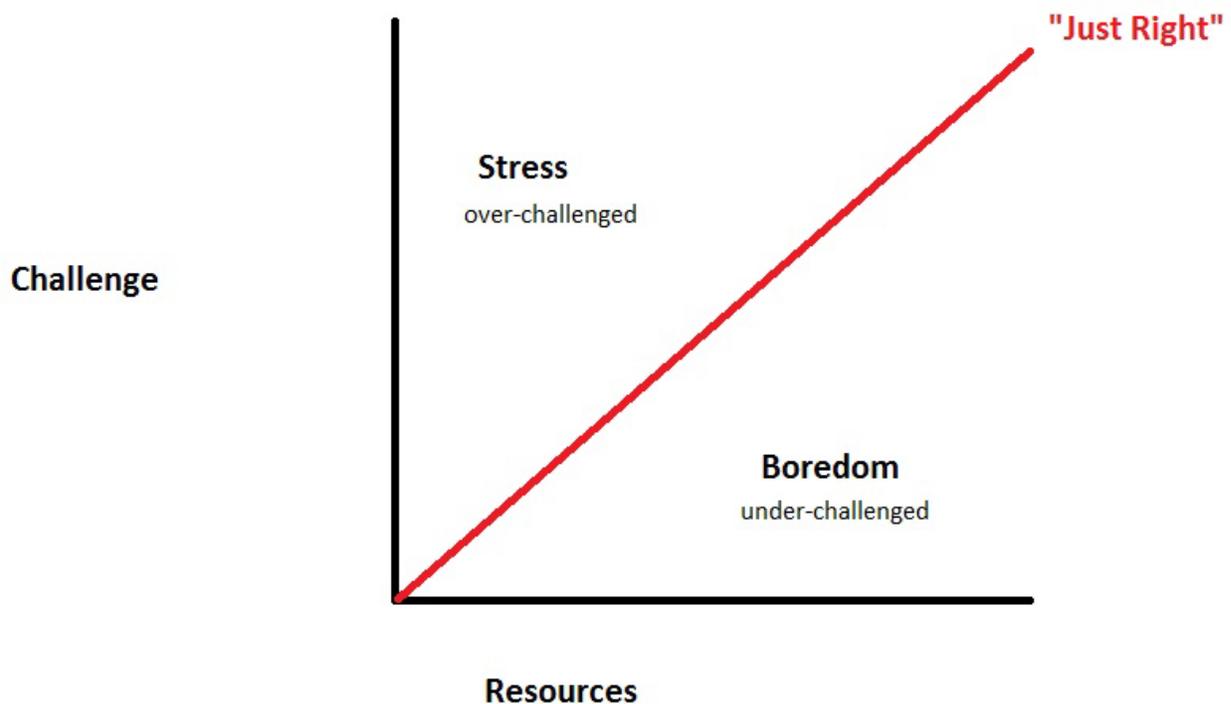
That's how personal development is, finding that just right, sweet spot in life. This may mean doing more or doing less. It may mean building more resources and skills.

- Doing less (or almost nothing) is a stress in and of itself. It is stressful when you have potential in you that you are not bringing out into the world.
- It is also stressful when you are doing more than your resources and skills can support.

Sometimes in order to find that sweet spot you need to do more or less, but don't forget the other important variable – *building more support and resources*.

Finding Balance

Too much challenge leads to feeling over-stressed, too little challenge leads to feeling under-challenged. We need the right Balance between *Skills, Challenge,* and *Resources* to be whole people, fully engaged in life.



Look at the Circle of Health, build your resources to support, grow and create your life!

Take a few moments to think about the following questions:

How did I learn to become a soldier?

What challenges did I face?

What skills did I need?

What types of training did I complete in order to be prepared?

What resources or tools did the military provide to help me do my job?

What did I learn about myself through these experiences?

What helped me to maintain a balance between challenge and skill?

As a civilian, what skills and resources do I need to meet current challenges in order to be a whole person?

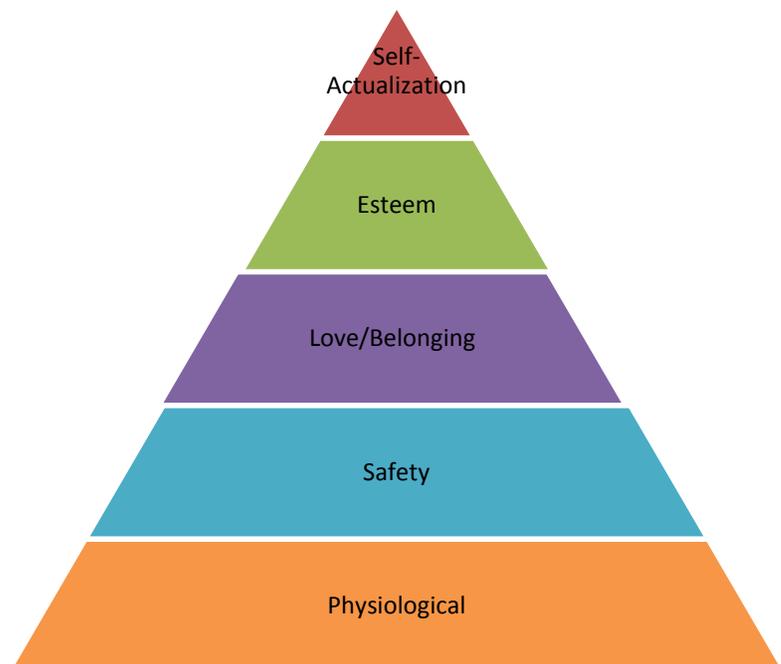
Am I missing resources in any important domains?

Consider Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs:

Abraham Maslow was a psychologist who thought a lot about personal development, personal growth and self-realization. He taught that you have to take care of the basics before you could work on higher level human needs.

This is another holistic model, like the Circle of Health, each level is related to the other levels.

Take a look at the diagram, if you want something higher up the triangle, sometimes you have to build up to it from the bottom.



Current Challenges:

Skills:

I have: _____

I need: _____

Resources:

I have: _____

I need: _____

Yes Man movie

In this movie, Jim Carrey's character, Carl, has retreated from life. He avoids his friends, he doesn't go out, he doesn't do anything – he just takes up space. Then a friend convinces him to go to a personal growth guru. The teaching is that saying "no" to life is not living, you must say "yes" to life. Carl becomes a "yes" man, saying yes to learning to speak Korean, to skydiving, to buying magazines, basically anytime someone asks him something, he says, "yes." This works well for him, he gets a girlfriend, his life turns around, he gains his self-confidence back. There is a twist near the end of the movie, where he has to learn to be able to say "no" sometimes, but "yes" most of the time. He learns that the problem is that when you have a habit of saying "no" to life all the time, you aren't really living.

This is a comedy that has a deep message. Pain, loss, heart wounds, disappointments happen to us and we are tempted to say "no" to life in order to

avoid more pain, but in doing so we cut ourselves off from the joy as well. See if you can challenge yourself to say “yes” to something this next week in order to grow and learn.

Veterans are Resources Equipped to Meet Challenges in YOUR Community

Video: The Mission Continues

[Google Search Videos: The Mission Continues](#)

The Mission Continues believes that Veterans are an asset to their communities. Find out how you can volunteer in your community.



Video: Growing Veterans

[Google Search Videos: Growing Veterans](#)



Mindfulness Practice:

“Sit comfortably and take a few deep breaths.

Imagine the different roles in your life’s journey: infant, child, son, daughter, teenager, lover, soldier, wife, husband, parent, grandparent, old age. You are the

same person, but you change roles over time. You are constant, but ever changing. You take on some roles and discard others, but you are still yourself. Imagine yourself in as many different roles as you can.

Picture yourself at each of these times, standing in front of you, so that you are looking at an array of your various selves in your various roles. Imagine these selves forming a circle around you, you can look out and see yourself at various stages, in various roles. Now, ask yourself, who is it who is in the center looking out? Who is it that persists despite all the different roles that you take on? Pause and stay with this question of who it is that is you as you change and take on different roles. Ask yourself, are you holding on to any role now?

Do you fear that if you let it go that you will cease to be who you are? Your identity is beyond a role, a role is just a form that you take on, but who is it who is within that form and persists through forms? Imagine that you can ask all of your former and future selves for help, ask now for help in releasing whatever role you might be stuck in, that is holding you back, and ask for help in transitioning to the new role that you do not quite yet understand or feel comfortable with.

Take a few more deep breaths, and slowly open your eyes. Jot down any thoughts or ideas that came to you.”

My Health Goals

Strategies to help me grow as a person:

Circle ONE strategy and set a goal:

- Cooking class Group at VA Community College classes
- Reflection Meditation Journaling Create art
- Learn a new skill Volunteer at homeless shelter Garden
- Volunteer at local school Volunteer at VA Library book club
- Build something Wood working Learn to play a musical instrument
- Donate unused items Babysit Help a neighbor Teach a class
- Be a Mentor Big Brother/Big Sister Attend a community meeting
- Work (full or part-time) _____ _____

My goal for the next week is: (SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time Bound. Example: I will walk at least 3 times this week for 15 minutes each, after I get home from work.)

Things that might get in my way: (Examples: weather, pain, time)

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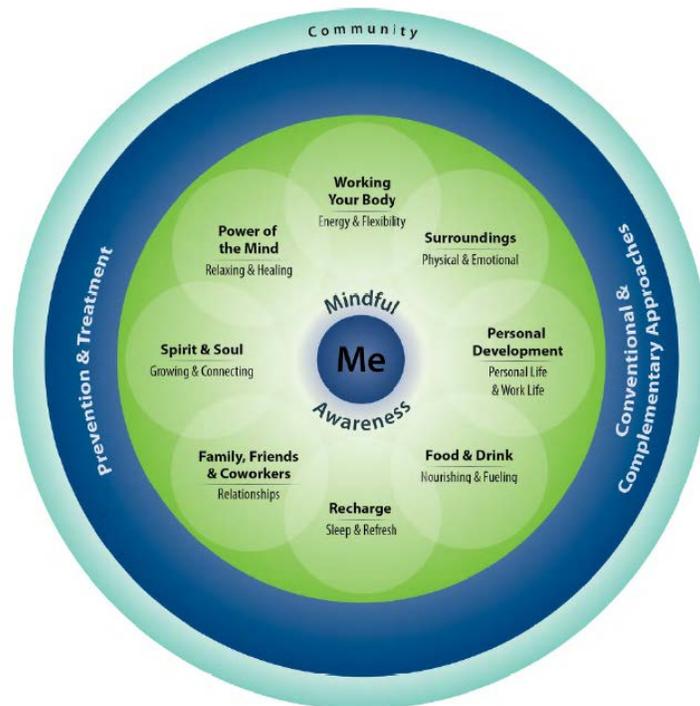
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Additional Resources to Grow as a Person:

VA Primary Care Class Brochure

Life Paths Class

Hero's Journey Class

Community Resources

Take a class at a local college or adult education program

If you don't know what to do, think about something you enjoyed as a child, is there a way you can recapture that youthful enthusiasm and bring that back into your life? Maybe you liked painting, drawing, playing make believe, or maybe being in nature or playing with pets. You can easily do these things as an adult, they might look slightly different (instead of playing make believe, you can join an amateur acting group, for instance).

Look for local volunteer options, either specific to Veterans like The Mission Continues or Growing Veterans, or options for anyone, like Habitat for Humanity or local animal shelters.

Say "Yes" to life – watch the movie, "Yes Man," and think about ways you could say "yes" and change your life.

The Red Badge Project: writing for Veterans: <http://theredbadgeproject.org/>

Military Experience & the Arts: <http://militaryexperience.org/>

Books

The Artist's Way, by Julia Cameron

Videos

Google Search:

["A Patient Centered Care Approach to: Personal Development"](#)

["Discovering Art & Healing at the VA"](#)

["My Life, My Story: Deliberate Story Telling,"](#)

Military Experience & the Arts: <http://militaryexperience.org/videos/>

Class 4: Food and Drink: Nourishing & Fueling



Nourishing and fueling our bodies gives us the energy and empowerment we need to accomplish our goals. Eat to live – enjoy! Savor! Don't Die-it, Live-it! Nourish yourself with fuel for life!

To improve my nutrition, I want to work on: _____

Mindful Eating

Mindful eating takes the concept of mindfulness and applies it to why, when, where, what and how you eat. This means being aware of both the physical and emotional feelings connected to eating.

Tips for Mindful Eating:

Observe your body. Notice hunger and fullness signals that guide you to start and stop eating.

Do not judge yourself or your reaction to food.

Notice your reaction to food. What do you like, what don't you like?

Savor your food. While eating, notice all the colors, smells, flavors and textures of the food.

Nourishing & Savoring: Eating to Live

We see and hear the word diet so often when we hear about healthy eating and when we talk to doctors and nurses. Yet research often shows that diets work only in the short-term and that the vast majority of people gain weight back.

UCLA researchers found that dieting doesn't work:

- The majority of people who dieted regained all the weight, plus more.
- Very few kept off the pounds they lost, while most gained weight.
- Diets do not lead to sustained weight loss or health benefits for the majority of people.

If dieting doesn't work, what does?

- Eating in moderation
- Regular exercise
- Taking time to notice Hunger and Fullness

Are you really hungry? Sometimes, we eat because we think we should, the clock says a certain time, or because others are eating. Focus on eating small, balanced

meals with small healthy snacks in between to keep your energy up and your hunger in control. Listen to your body and eat when you are hungry.

You should only eat until you feel satisfied or almost full. Listen to your body

Stop eating 2 or 3 times during each meal to ask yourself if you are still hungry or starting to feel satisfied.

Feelings of satisfaction or fullness do not happen right away. Eating slowly will help. After you finish eating, check again to see how full you are. You never want to be too hungry or too full.

It is best to stay between 3 and 7 on the hunger/fullness scale.

Rating	Hunger/Fullness Scale
10	Uncomfortably full or “sick” – “Thanksgiving full”
9	Stuffed and uncomfortable
8	Too full, somewhat uncomfortable
7	Full, but not yet uncomfortable – hunger is gone
6	Filling up, but still comfortable – could still eat more
5	Neutral – neither hungry nor full
4	Slightly hungry, mild signals that your body needs food – you can wait to eat
3	Hungry, not yet uncomfortable – clear signals that your body needs food
2	Very hungry, irritable, or anxious – you want to eat everything in sight
1	Starving, feeling weak, lightheaded, dizzy, or other extremely uncomfortable symptoms of hunger

N04 Nutrition Handouts • N04 Version 5.0; www.move.va.gov

Let's get rid of "Die-it" and focus on "Live-it" instead!

It is common to hear that the word "diet" has the word "die" in it. This saying is repeated so often because people's approach to a diet is a way of killing themselves – killing their passion, their likes, their enjoyment of food, and their joy of life. We would prefer to focus on a Live-it instead of a Die-it. Here's the difference:

DIE-IT

Short-term
Suffering
Deprivation
Narrowness
Takes you out of life
Focuses only on not eating
Health

LIVE-IT

Long-term
Enjoyment and savoring
Adding things you love
Balance
Connects you to life
Focuses on eating + all domains of Whole

What's Healthy? What's Not?

It can be really difficult to know what is healthy and what is not. If you've listened to the experts over the last 50 years, you'll realize that our understanding of health and food is constantly changing.

Here are a few basic ideas.

The best advice is to eat a balance of fresh food. It is not that you can't eat things on the "What's Not" list, but they should be more like seasonings or treats in your daily or weekly eating, not the main course.

What's Healthy

Fresh food
Natural bright colors (fruit/veg)
Outside aisles of grocery store
Whole grains
Small, frequent meals
Natural salt & sugars in foods

What's Not

Packaged and processed food
Artificial bright colors
Inside aisles of grocery store
Processed grains
Fewer, bigger meals
Added salt & sugar to foods

Oil in fish, nuts, olive oil
A good amount of food
Occasional glass of red wine

Trans-fats, lard
Too much of any food

Drinking

A rough rule is that you can live 3 days without water and 3 weeks without food. This varies depending on personal and environmental factors. We know drinking water is healthy and it is often said that 70% of the human body is made up of water. Alcohol is not a natural part of the human body. The use of alcohol for ritual and recreational purposes is ancient. Active duty personnel and Veterans have higher rates of drug and alcohol use and problems than civilians. Too much of a good thing is unhealthy. Veterans with PTSD, depression, anxiety, diabetes, heart disease, head injury and older Veterans should all be cautious with alcohol and maybe not drink



Mindfulness Practice:

Mindful Eating

Try this simple exercise to promote mindful eating, adapted from Thich Nhat Hahn's book *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* (Bantam, 1992).

Before you begin eating, look down at your food. Take in what it looks like, how it smells, and think about where it came from.

...See if you can notice the urge to eat (e.g., your mouth watering, the feeling of hunger), before you take a bite.

Put a bite in your mouth. Notice how the food feels in your mouth and what it tastes like.

Before you swallow, notice the things that happen in your mouth when you put food in. Notice how you salivate, notice the urge to swallow, notice the sensation of chewing.

As you swallow your food, notice what that feels like. How does your stomach feel now that it is one bite fuller?

Repeat your mindful eating for each bite until your meal is finished.

Try to decide when the meal is finished based on the sensations in your body (e.g., the feeling of fullness in your belly, no more sensation of hunger) rather than on whether your plate is clean.

Mindfulness may help you avoid overeating. First bites may be the most satisfying, and additional bites may not be pleasurable. This can help with portion control.

My Health Goals

Strategies to help me Nourish and Fuel my Body:

Circle ONE strategy and set a goal:

- Practice Mindful Eating Make a grocery list Use a meal planning App
- Drink more water Invite a friend over for dinner Plan meals
- Try a new recipe Visit a VA Nutritionist Set the table
- Measure food before a meal Try one new fruit or vegetable
- _____ _____ _____

What Matters to Me – What do I want my Health for?

My goal for the next week is: (SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time Bound. Example: I will walk at least 3 times this week for 15 minutes each, after I get home from work.)

Things that might get in my way: (Examples: weather, pain, time)

What I can do to overcome these things: (Examples: exercise indoors, walk with a friend)

I believe I can reach my goal: (Circle the number that matches how confident you feel.)

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

Not at All Sure

Somewhat Sure

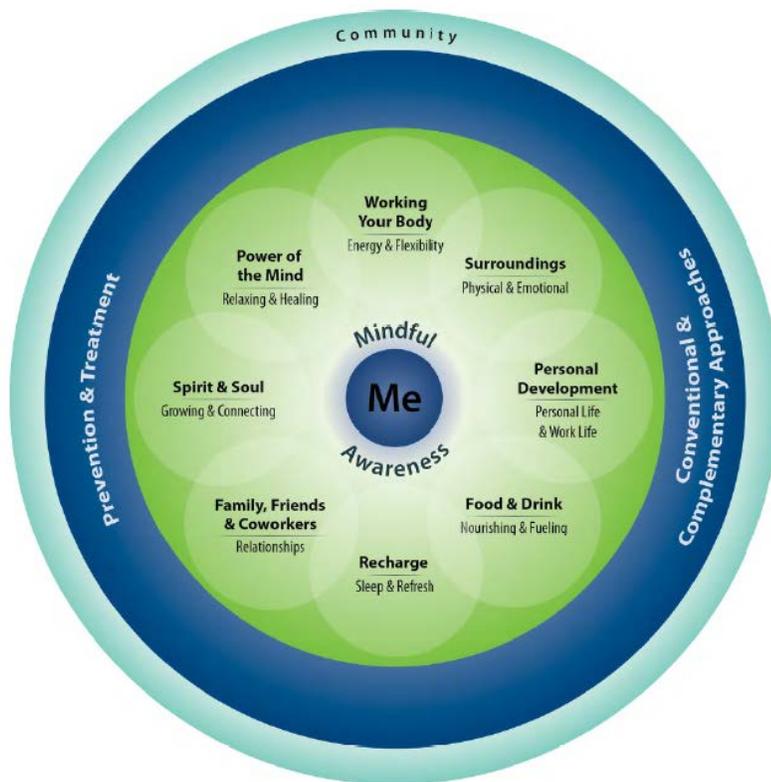
Very Sure

My Progress Report

for week beginning:
(date)

Goal:

Day of week	Action Taken	Comments (how I felt, challenges, successes)
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		



Additional Resources to Nourish and Fuel Your Body

Websites

Move! Website Handouts: <http://www.move.va.gov/handouts.asp>

Supertracker: Get personalized nutrition and exercise plan as well as tips to make healthier choices and plan ahead.

<https://www.supertracker.usda.gov/default.aspx>

Choose My Plate: Great resource for nutrition and meal planning.

choosemyplate.gov

Drinker's Checkup: Brief questionnaire that can be completed online and offers personalized feedback on your drinking habits:

http://drinkerscheckup.com/pre_register/AUDIT.aspx

VA Web Page on Nutrition: http://www.nutrition.va.gov/Nutrition_Handouts.asp

University of Michigan Integrative Medicine, Healing Foods Pyramid:

<http://www.med.umich.edu/umim/food-pyramid/>

Videos

Make the Connection (Web Resources for alcohol and drug use)

<http://maketheconnection.net/symptoms/alcohol-drug-problems>

Rethinking Drinking (National Institute of Health):

<http://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/isyourdrinkingpatternrisky/whatsatriskorheavydrinking.asp>

Videos

Google Search Video: ["A Patient Centered Care Approach To: Food & Drink"](#)

Class 5: Recharge Sleep & Refresh



Sleep is very important for our body and mind. Rest can give us peace. Relaxation can lower stress. Activities we enjoy can help us feel recharged. A good balance between activity and rest improves our health and well-being.

To improve my sleep, I want to work on: _____

Sleep & Refresh

Some people don't have trouble sleeping, or maybe the trouble is they sleep too much but don't feel rested. This can sometimes be a medical problem (e.g., Sleep Apnea), but sleep isn't the only way that we feel refreshed, we also have to be engaged and interacting with life. "If there is a secret to a good night's sleep, it is a good day's waking." To feel refreshed and energized is not just a matter of sleeping more, sometimes it is a matter of doing more during the day. The human body is designed to be active 2/3rds of the day and resting 1/3rd of the day. In addition to any focus on your sleep this coming week, what can you focus on during your day to have *a good day's waking*?

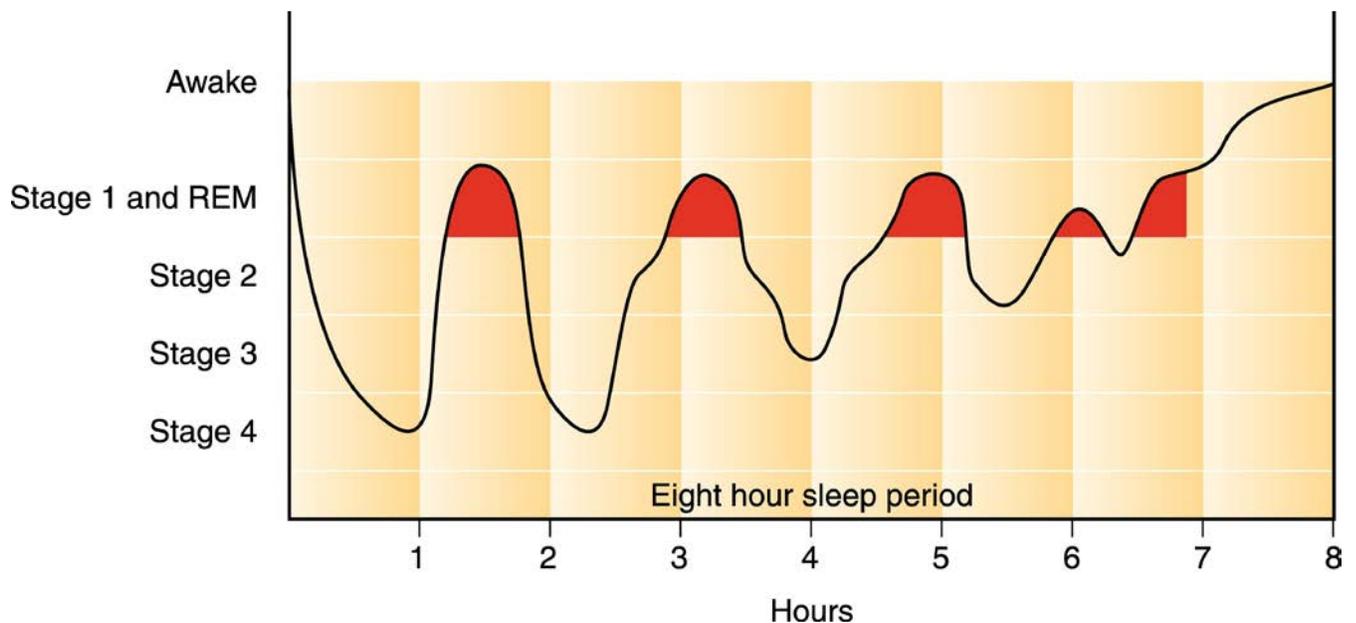
"If there is a secret to a good night's sleep, it is a good day's waking."

(Rubin Naiman, Ph.D., Insomnia chapter, *Integrative Medicine*, Third Edition, David Rakel)

How Sleep Works

Video: Basic Introduction to Sleep

[Google Search Videos: "What Happens when we sleep"](#)



How much time do you spend in bed at night?

2 - 4 hours 4 - 6 hours 6 - 8 hours 8 - 10 hours 12 + hours

How much time do you spend asleep?

2 - 4 hours 4 - 6 hours 6 - 8 hours 8 - 10 hours 12 + hours

Do Veterans Really Get Less Sleep?

Many Veterans have been exposed to violence, death and trauma. The brain is designed to remember negative things to help you avoid them in the future, but sometimes this self-protective mechanism won't stop and it interferes with sleep.

- Approximately 40% of Veterans in primary care have difficulties sleeping (Insomnia) vs. 19% of the general community.
- Service members who have been deployed are more likely to report sleep difficulties both during and after deployment.
- Combat exposure and mental health symptoms both contribute to increased sleep difficulties.

Many Veterans experience challenges sleeping well. Which challenges do you experience?

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Can't fall asleep | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't feel tired | <input type="checkbox"/> Wake up frequently |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nightmares | <input type="checkbox"/> Wake up too early | <input type="checkbox"/> Bed partner snores |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking too much | <input type="checkbox"/> Uncomfortable | <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated I can't sleep |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CPAP* machine | <input type="checkbox"/> Sweating | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

*Continuous positive airway pressure therapy (CPAP) uses a machine to help a person who has obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) breathe more easily during sleep. A CPAP machine increases air pressure in your throat so that your airway doesn't collapse when you breathe in.

Personal Costs of Poor Sleep

- Associated with a variety of physical, cognitive, and emotional difficulties.
- Insomnia increases your risk for future depression.
- When co-morbid with depression, insomnia is associated with poorer response to depression treatment.
- Poor sleep is associated with several medical conditions.
 - Hypertension
 - Obesity
 - Type 2 diabetes mellitus
 - Obstructive sleep apnea



Obstructive Sleep Apnea

Mild/Moderate/Severe Obstructive Sleep Apnea

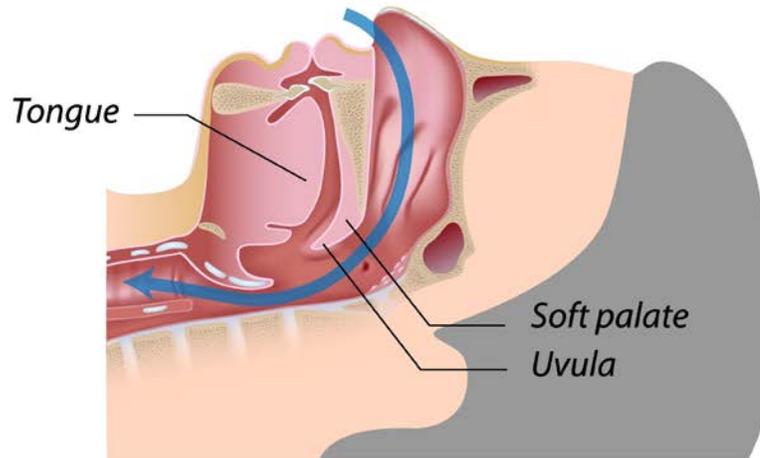
- This means that you wake up many times at night due to the inability to breathe (airway becomes narrow, prevents oxygen from reaching the brain)
- You wake the most often During XXX phase of sleep (up to XXX times per hour, or 1 time every 2 minutes)
- Dreaming happens during REM sleep (Rapid Eye Movement)
- Waking up due to an apneic event may feel like suffocating, drowning, or having a nightmare.
- Waking up frequently will cause you to feel sleepy, irritable, and may contribute to memory and health problems.

Recommendations to reduce apneic events:

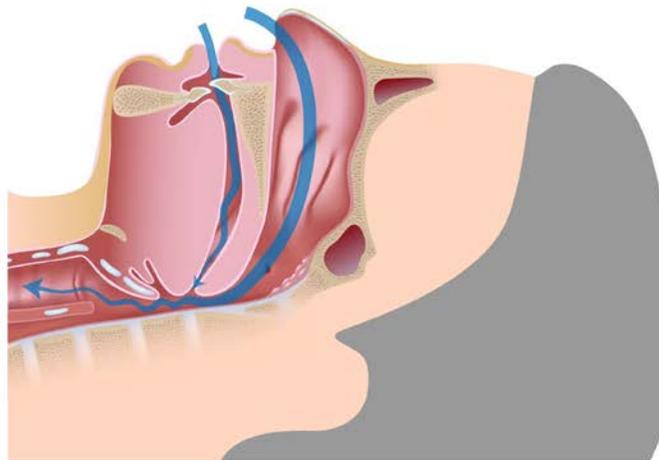
- Sleep on stomach or sides
- Consider purchasing sleep apnea – mouth guard
- Consider CPAP machine treatment – the most effective form of treatment

- Remind self that nightmares or experience of waking up gasping (suffocating) is likely an apneic event

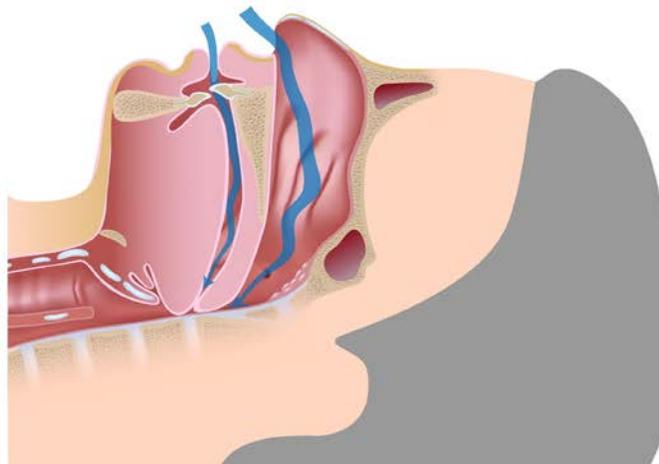
Normal breathing



Snoring - Partial obstruction of the airway



OSA - Complete obstruction of the airway

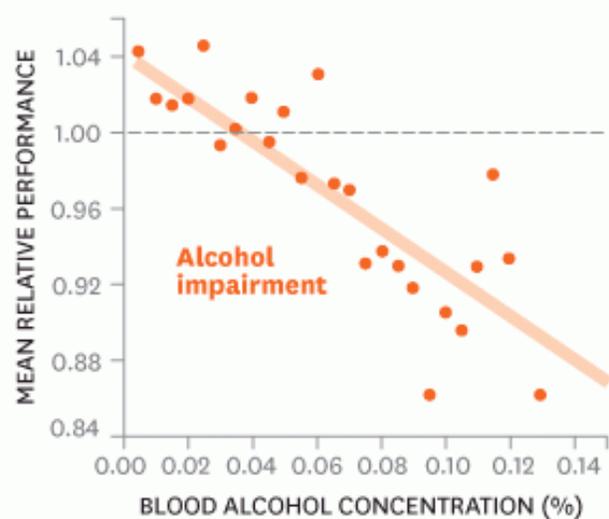
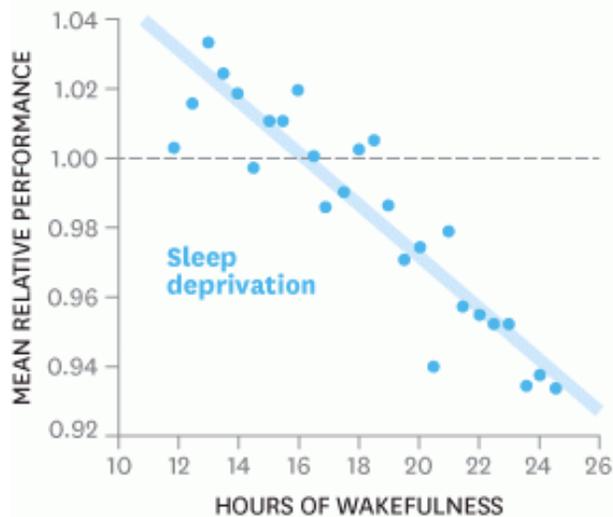


Risks of Sleep Deprivation

- Impairment in cognitive & motor abilities that is equivalent to alcohol intoxication.
- Increased risk of car accidents.

THREE SHEETS TO THE WIND

Research shows the effect on performance of even a moderate level of fatigue is equivalent to or greater than what is considered acceptable for alcohol intoxication.



SOURCE DREW DAWSON AND KATHRYN REID'S "FATIGUE, ALCOHOL, AND PERFORMANCE IMPAIRMENT," NATURE VOL. 388, JULY 1997.

HBR.ORG

Tips for Improving Your Sleep

- Ingest no substances that contain caffeine after 4 pm:** No soda, coffee, or over-the-counter medicines containing caffeine after 4pm.
- Engage in regular exercise of 30 minutes duration four times per week:** But, do not exercise within 3-4 hours of bedtime.
- Do not drink more than one ounce (1 drink) of alcohol per day:** It can worsen sleep difficulties considerably.

- ❑ **Do not smoke cigarettes:** Smoking can contribute to insomnia because of nicotine withdrawal symptoms at night. Consider treatment to quit smoking.
- ❑ **Do not take naps:** Taking naps will disrupt your circadian sleep cycle and make it hard to fall asleep at bedtime.
- ❑ **Make sure your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable:** A cooler room along with enough blankets to stay warm is best; use a blackout shade to block early morning sunlight or street lights; use earplugs or a “white noise” machine to mask noise; no TV in the bedroom.
- ❑ **“Wind down” before bedtime and create a bedtime routine that focuses on increasing relaxation/calm prior to sleep:** It is important to give your body clues that it is time to slow down and sleep. Listen to relaxing music, read something soothing, pray, take a warm bath, or do a crossword puzzle.
- ❑ **Avoid over-arousal for at least 2-3 hours prior to going to sleep:** Avoid activities that will get your body and mind in “arousal mode.” Things that may tend to do this are: heavy meals, strenuous exercise, heated arguments, paying bills, and action-packed and/or violent movies or TV programs.
- ❑ **Do not drink fluids after 8 pm:** This may reduce awakenings due to urination.
- ❑ **Do not sleep with your pet on the bed.**
- ❑ **Do not expose yourself to bright light if you need to get up at night:** Use a small nightlight instead.
- ❑ **Consider a light nighttime snack:** a light snack after dinner may prevent hunger from waking you up in the middle of the night. Drinking warm milk may help.
- ❑ **Take a hot bath 60-90 minutes before bedtime.**

Mindfulness practice can reduce wakefulness and improve sleep

Basic Mindfulness for Sleep, aka “*Beditation*”

Prepare your space for good sleep.

Close your eyes and put one hand on your chest and one hand on your belly. Take 3 deep breaths as deeply as you can, see if you can get your belly to rise up as you breathe in and to sink as you breathe out. When we are relaxed we breathe like babies, using our whole bodies. Stay with this position as long as comfortable, allowing your breathing to happen naturally and your body to drink deeply of breath.

If thoughts arise – could be anything, something negative or positive from the day, something from the past, even a self-critical thought that you are not doing this correctly – imagine that the thought is like a leaf in the water or the air, it flows along on its own current, sometimes coming toward you, sometimes away from you. You are more than your thoughts; your thoughts are just one aspect of yourself. If you find your thoughts disturbing, go back to the anchor of your breath.

If emotions arise – could be anything, something positive or negative from the day, a memory from the past, a feeling that you can’t do this exercise or that it is stupid – imagine that emotion is a drop of food coloring and you are a container of liquid. If you make yourself small and tight, that emotion more intensely colors your experience; if you make yourself more expansive and vast, that emotion color is still there, but it gets more and more diluted as you expand your self into a larger and larger container.

If images arise – could be anything, something positive or negative from the day, a flashback from the past, or a pleasant image from the past – imagine that the image is on a tv screen and you have a remote control. You can pause, fast-forward, even turn off the tv. You can also move closer or further from the tv, up close to really experience the image playing in your mind, or away from it, even into another room and close the door while the image plays on tv.

My Health Goals

Strategies to help improve my sleep

Circle ONE strategy and set a goal:

- limit television before bed limit caffeine at least 6 hours before bed
- focus on breathing for 2-5 minutes before sleep exercise in the morning
- Try a relaxing exercise before bed get out of bed if unable to sleep
- Limit “screen time” (phone, electronic devices, computers) 30 mins before bed
- consistent bed time consistent wake time _____

What Matters to Me – What do I want my Health for?

My goal for the next week is: (SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time Bound. Example: I will walk at least 3 times this week for 15 minutes each, after I get home from work.)

Things that might get in my way: (Examples: weather, pain, time)

What I can do to overcome these things: (Examples: exercise indoors, walk with a friend)

I believe I can reach my goal: (Circle the number that matches how confident you feel.)

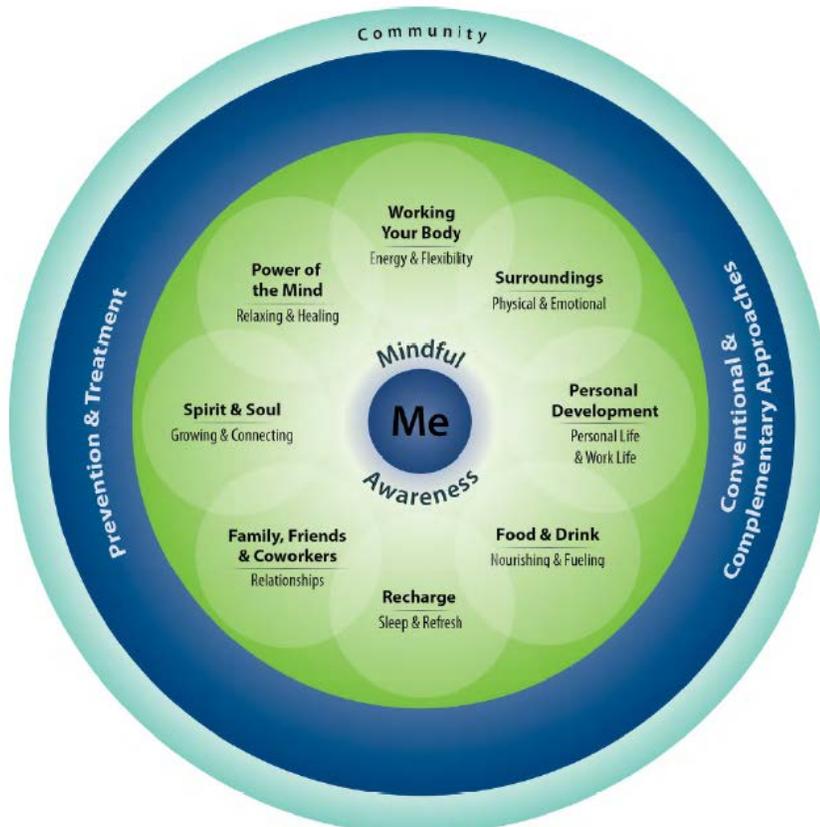
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at All Sure Somewhat Sure Very Sure

My Progress Report

for week beginning:
(date)

Goal:

Day of week	Action Taken	Comments (how I felt, challenges, successes)
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		



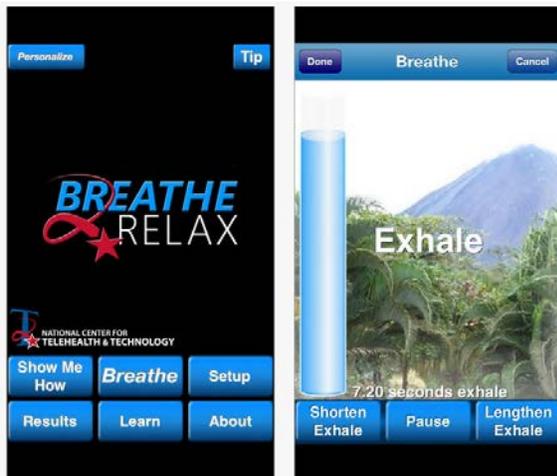
Additional Resources to Improve your Sleep:

Free Mobile Apps!

CBT-I Coach



Breathe2Relax



Videos

Google Video Search: ["Practicing What Matters Most: Sleep, Rest and Relaxation"](#)

Google Video Search: ["A Patient Centered Approach to Recharge, Rest, and Sleep"](#)

Basic Introduction to Sleep

[Google Video Search: Introduction to Sleep](#)

Advanced Introduction to Sleep

[Google Video Search: How Sleep Works](#)

“Eye Calisthenics:”

Power Nap REM Simulation Exercise

In REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep, your eyes move rapidly back and forth. People often wake feeling rested after deep sleep with REM. Here is a simple exercise you can do either for a power nap during the day or as a practice when you are having trouble sleeping at night.

Get comfortable, sitting in a quiet place or lying in bed. Close your eyes.

Move your eyes as far as you can to the right, pause and hold, then move your eyes as far as you can to the left, pause and hold. Do this back and forth a few times.

Now do the same thing only up and down. Look down as far as you can (with your eyes closed), pause and hold, now look up as far as you can (with your eyes closed), pause and hold.

Now, look for sore muscles in your eyes by moving your eyes around in a clockwise circle slowly, stretching your eyes the way you might bend and stretch your back.

Now rotate your eyes slowly in a counter-clockwise circle, looking for any place that is sore and stretch your eye muscles in that direction.

Lastly, see if you can let your eyes move randomly, stretching out your eye muscles – up, down, right, left, in circles, any movement that your eyes want to do.

Now you can relax your eyes, just let them sit. Take a few deep breaths with your whole body. If you are trying to sleep, stay in this place, if this is a power nap, slowly open your eyes.

Class 6: Relationships: Friends, Family, and Coworkers



Positive social relationships are healthy. A healthy intimate relationship with a life partner, with family, friends, neighbors, and pets can be a source of strength. It's good to talk to people who care about us and listen to us.

To improve my relationships, I want to work on: _____

Relationships keep us healthy

- People with more social connections live longer than those who are isolated
- Social connection helps prevent depression and PTSD
- Even having a pet at home improves life expectancy after a heart attack compared to living alone
- Even imagining a relationship and connection can be life-saving

Close Relationships and Our Health

Our relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and pets can contribute to Reduced Stress.

- *If we are communicating well and feel loved / supported.*
- However, high levels of conflict / communication problems in our close relationships can *contribute* to stress, which in turn can impact our health negatively.

Veterans and Relationships

[Google Search Video: “Make the Connection VA Relationships”](#)

Our relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and pets can motivate us to Increase Healthy Behaviors:

- Eat nourishing foods
- Eat regular meals
- Move more
- Take a walk
- Get fresh air
- Research pet breeds and pet care
- Learn new things
- Keep / make doctors’ appointments
- Keep us “on track” with our health goals
- Motivate us to keep moving forward when discouraged in our lives

Our relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and pets can provide us with Physical Closeness and Intimacy.

- Research has shown that people can have health benefits related to physical contact / closeness with a partner (or a pet).
- Physical contact like holding hands / embracing / massage / sexual intimacy are associated with decreased blood pressure and cortisol (“stress hormone”) levels over time.
- Physical contact with Pets can reduce stress, lower blood pressure, lessen loneliness, increase social interaction and physical activity, and help us learn.

Feeling physically close to a partner or a pet can have physiological benefits during times of stress.



Social Isolation Contributes to Poor Health

“Captors use social isolation to torture prisoners of war—to drastic effect. Social isolation of otherwise healthy, well-functioning individuals eventually results in psychological and physical disintegration, and even death. Over the past few decades, social scientists have gone beyond evidence of extreme social deprivation to demonstrate a clear link between social relationships and health in the general population. Adults who are more socially connected are healthier and live longer than their more isolated peers.” *Social Relationships and Health: A Flashpoint for Health Policy*, by Debra Umberson & Jennifer Karas Montez.

Power of the Imagination.

Psychiatrist, Victor Frankel survived 3 years in Nazi concentration camps and went on to become a world famous psychiatrist and writer. In his popular book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, he wrote about an episode where imagining his wife's face helped him survive those difficult times and even to have a deep, spiritual experience in the midst of the suffering of the camps.

"But my mind clung to my wife's image, imagining it with an uncanny acuteness. I heard her answering me, saw her smile, her frank and encouraging look. Real or not, her look was then more luminous than the sun which was beginning to rise.

"... Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of Man is through love and in love. I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way — an honorable way — in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment. For the first time in my life I was able to understand the meaning of the words, "The angels are lost in perpetual contemplation of an infinite glory."

Victor Frankel – Man's Search for Meaning

If I'm experiencing relationship problems, what can I do about it?

Many Veterans have overcome relationship problems that may arise after time away from the family or other experiences such as traumatic events or stressful situations.

- Make a “communication plan” for expressing your thoughts and feelings – think about **what** you want to say and **how** you want to say it.
- Listen to what others who care about you have to say
- Engage with others like you who may be experiencing similar issues
- Exercise regularly to help relieve stress and boost your mood
- Practice relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing
- Get the right amount of sleep
- Maintain a healthy diet by eating right
- Make an effort to spend time with people you care about to relax or have fun
- Find something social to do—this may be a hobby, a Veterans’ group, volunteer work, or being involved in a place of worship
- Balance alone time and together time
- “It’s all about that person to your left and right.”
- “Relationships kept us strong—and kept us alive—while we were in and it’s important to maintain our personal relationships now that we’re out.”

Loving Kindness as an Antidote to Isolation

Many religious traditions have some form of prayer or exercise in which a person can imagine her or him self in relationship with angels, God, saints or other spiritual figures. One of these practices is Loving Kindness Meditation, which is now being studied at the VA as a treatment for PTSD.

If you think about training for war, you have to close your heart to the enemy as well as to your own emotional reactions. Loving Kindness is a perfect antidote for opening your heart back up after military service in order to live again in civilian society.

Loving Kindness Meditation

Start by sitting comfortably in your chair, feet on the floor if possible.

Close your eyes or partially close them if that is more comfortable. Start by taking 3 deep breaths.

Imagine someone whom it is very easy to love – a pet, a child, a grandchild, a grandparent – they can be living or deceased. Imagine a feeling of love for this person or animal in your chest. Enjoy the warm feeling this gives you. Become aware of your heart and how it is capable of this pure, unconditional love.

Next, imagine someone close to you who you truly love, but who sometimes causes you grief – this could be a spouse, a child, a sibling, a close friend – someone you definitely love, but it is a love that sometimes requires some work. See if you can connect to that warm feeling of unconditional love you had in the previous step and now extend it from yourself to this other person. Start with the feeling in yourself and then extend it outward, maybe an image of light or color might help to kindle this state of loving kindness.

Now, imagine this feeling of loving kindness in your heart and extend it to yourself, see how much you can imagine fully loving yourself. Some people may find it more challenging to love themselves than loving other people.

Next, imagine someone you saw today, someone you barely know – maybe someone on the bus or who you walked past in the clinic. Feel the state of loving kindness in your heart, and in your imagination extend this outward toward that other person.

Next, imagine someone you have a more problematic relationship with, someone who you find challenging – this could be a family member, a boss, a co-worker, maybe even a VA employee – challenge yourself to see how much loving kindness you can generate and extend toward that person.

This Loving Kindness exercise can also be done as a prayer, sometimes called a *Metta* Prayer in the Buddhist tradition.

*May I be well
May I be peaceful
May I be safe and protected
May I be happy & healthy*

*May You be well
May You be peaceful
May You be safe and protected
May You be happy & healthy*

*May we all be well
May we all be peaceful
May we all be safe and protected
May we all be happy & healthy*

My Health Goals

Strategies to help improve my relationships

Circle ONE strategy and set a goal:

- Take pet for a walk Listen to what others say Ask questions
- Be curious about others Share something about yourself
- Practice patience Avoid judgment and blame Call a friend
- Try not to hold grudges Take a time out Say I'm Sorry
- Reach out to others Write a letter Share a meal
- Invite someone to do something you enjoy Join a meet-up group
- Give a hug/high five Practice Kindness Say thank you Smile

My goal for the next week is: (SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time Bound. Example: I will walk at least 3 times this week for 15 minutes each, after I get home from work.)

Things that might get in my way: (Examples: weather, pain, time)

What I can do to overcome these things: (Examples: exercise indoors, walk with a friend)

I believe I can reach my goal: (Circle the number that matches how confident you feel.)

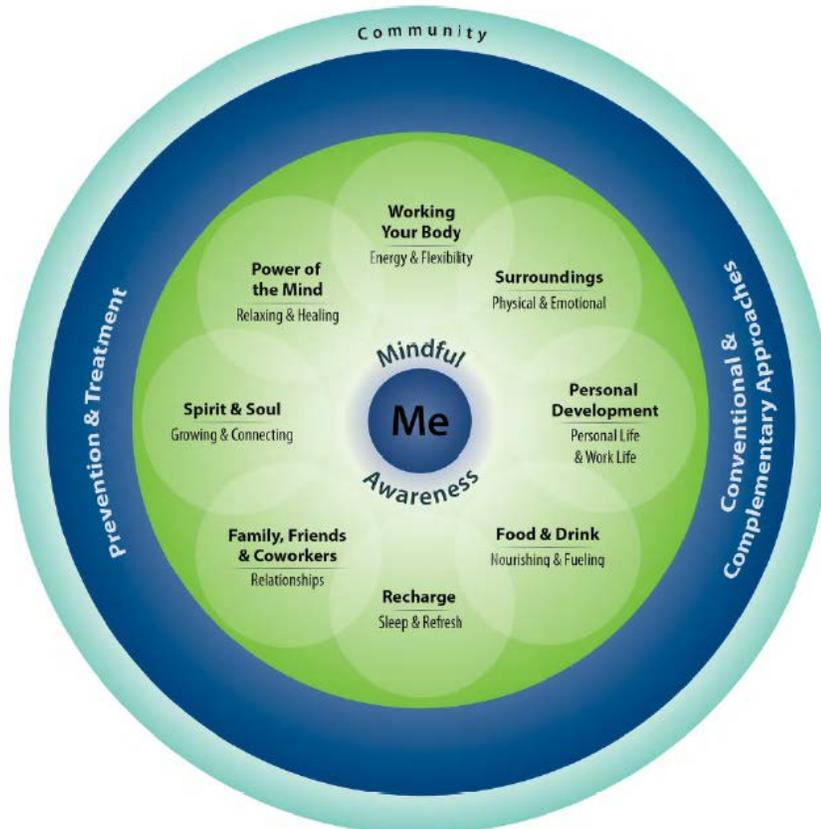
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at All Sure			Somewhat Sure				Very Sure		

My Progress Report

for week beginning:
(date)

Goal:

Day of week	Action Taken	Comments (how I felt, challenges, successes)
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		



Additional Resources to help improve your Relationships:

VA Couples Therapy

Through the Mental Health Clinic

- 5 week couple's communication workshop
- Marital therapy

VA Classes: Interpersonal Skills Group

Books

The 7 Principles for Making Marriage Work, John Gottman, Ph.D.

After the War Zone: A Practical Guide for Returning Troops and Their Families, Laurie Slone and Matthew J Friedman

Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus, John Gray

We Have To Talk: Healing Dialogues Between Women and Men, Samuel Shem (Stephen Bergman) and Janet Surrey

Apps

Parenting2Go: VA App for parenting skills

<https://mobile.va.gov/app/parenting2go>

Rejection Therapy: The card game that encourages you to try one thing each day to "get rejected" as you work to increase comfort in social settings.

<http://rejectiontherapy.com/>

Videos Online Program

"Practicing What Matters Most: Fostering Healing Relationships"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-eecY6O2sE&feature=youtu.be>

"A Patient Centered Care Approach to: Family, Friends, and Co-Workers"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmqMRCezb0&list=PL3AQ_JVoBEyZh1RDFeKIWkiY2z19Qg7yv&index=28

Online Program

Mission Reconnect: Wellness Training for Veterans & their Partners

<http://www.collinge.org/MissionReconnect.html>

Class 7: Spirit & Soul: Growing & Connecting



A sense of meaning and purpose in life is important to everybody. When things are hard, where do we turn for strength and comfort? Some people turn to spiritual or religious faith. Some people find comfort in nature. Some connect with art, music or prefer quiet time alone. Some want to help others. We may express this as a guide to living fully.

To improve my spiritual life, I want to work on: _____

Spirituality and Connection

Studies have shown benefits for physical and mental health. Spirituality is part of a person's Whole Health.

Meaning, purpose, and connection to something larger than the self are universal human needs. These needs can be met in belonging to something larger than the self, such as a religious community, but they are not dependent upon a belief in God or belonging to a particular group. The spiritual can be found in nature, relationships, music, art, creation, hobbies, meditation, helping others, and being of service.

We can think of spirit and soul as religious, spiritual, or even as engagement and connection with life. The soul connects the greater spiritual realm of purpose and meaning with our physical lives...in other words, the soul is the intermediary between spirit and matter, trauma, grief, and disappointment. Difficult childhood and life experiences can injure the soul and disrupt the connection between our body and spirit. This can leave us feeling like broken objects.

We are meant to live in a world rich with communion, connection, compassion, consultation, and convocation with others. We exist in a web of relationships and this is also part of our web of health. Our inherent nature is to be social. Human beings have evolved within groups and communities, not as lone wolves.



Veterans' Spiritual Journey or Pilgrimage

Veterans have many unique spiritual needs. Being trained to kill, killing or seeing others killed, military sexual trauma – all these things occur as part of military service and can have a lasting impact on Veterans. Veterans often feel that they have lost important parts of themselves after they return home from war. The loss of connection with faith or religious beliefs and loss of a sense of purpose or meaning can make it difficult to reconnect with family and friends and lead to a sense of isolation.

Many of the challenges that Veterans face upon returning to civilian life are not *diseases* and *disorders*, but may represent challenges associated with becoming cut off from spiritual beliefs and faith communities. These challenges represent some of the occupational hazards of military service.



Veterans can find spiritual healing and work through these challenges by reconnecting with their community, creation, and with themselves. Sometimes this process of reconnection takes the form of a journey or pilgrimage. This lifelong journey or pilgrimage begins when Veterans go to war and continues as Veterans return home and work to reconnect with themselves, their families, and their community.

Spiritual pilgrimage may take the form of a physical or an emotional journey across time and space. Or, spiritual pilgrimage may take the form of a brief journey inwards into the emotional and spiritual experience of the present moment.

An essence of the spiritual dimension is the transformation of the “bad” into the “good,” this comes through having an openness toward life experiences.

Wounded Veterans Spiritual Pilgrimage

[Google Search Videos: “Wounded Veterans pilgrimage”](#)

- What does the idea of a “spiritual pilgrimage” mean to you?
- How might taking a pilgrimage (physical or spiritual) help bring healing and restoration into your life?



Veterans and Spiritual Practice

There are many spiritual practices that may be used along the spiritual journey: prayer, mantra, religious events or ceremonies, shared meals, creation of artwork, gardening, purification rituals and many more.

Spiritual practices can help us to re-establish a spiritual connection and open us up to inspiration or being inspired. This is something that cannot be forced, but which can be encouraged or welcomed. We can create space within ourselves through spiritual practices such as rituals, through doing new things, and through quieting into stillness. Inspiration may strike at any time, in the shower, during meditation or prayer, on a walk in the woods.

Inspiration means both “breathing in” as well as being “inspired by.”

Breath and spirit are connected. Noticing the breath is another way to help create room for inspiration and spiritual connection in your life – doing slow, gentle, deep breathing practice, this creates an opening or space within you, within your lungs, for spirit to enter.

- What does the idea of a “spiritual practice” mean to you?
- What spiritual practice would you be willing to try to make yourself more capable of being inspired?
- How could you create the space or opening within yourself for inspiration to occur within you?

Native American Veterans Spiritual Purification

[Google Search: American Lake VA Sweat Lodge](#)



“Our Mission is to bring peace and healing to the lives of our Men and Women who have served and sacrificed for the good of the Nation. It is with respect and

humility that we offer the traditional ways of our forefathers towards this purpose..."

The Sweat Lodge (*Inipi*) is available to Native American Veterans as well as all Veterans and also to Staff (please see schedule on website).

Veteran's Affairs Chaplaincy

[Google Search Video: "VA chaplain"](#)

The VA provides Chaplaincy services for Veterans of all faiths on both an inpatient and outpatient basis. Chaplain coverage is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, particularly in urgent situations or emergencies. If you desire to contact a member of your local clergy, the chaplain can help you arrange that visit.



The Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I
cannot change,

The courage to change the things I can,

And the wisdom to know the difference.

Mindfulness:

Zoom In/Zoom Out

A visualization to work on this sense of connection of the inner and outer can be done in which you focus on one individual atom in your body (things get a bit weird if you focus tighter in on this bit of "matter." Whether you do it in a visualization, or if you just start reading what physicists think makes up an atom), and then you can gradually pan out.

The atom is in a molecule – the molecule is in a fluid or material substance – which is in a sub-portion of an organ – which is in an organ – which is in a part of your body – which is part of your entire body – your body is in a physical location – this location is in a sub-region of a country – which is in a country – which is part of a continent – which is in a hemisphere of the Earth – which is the Earth – expanding out is the moon, orbiting the Earth – neighboring the Earth is Mars and Venus – expanding out through the planets of the solar system, reaching the sun and the debated far objects, like poor old Pluto, no longer considered a planet by the astronomers – and, man, look at all the "empty" space around our solar system (you can delve into "dark energy" and "dark matter" in space between "things" in another visualization) – and then another solar system- and another – and another – until the solar systems make up points of light in the Milky Way Galaxy – and then vast, "empty" space – and then another galaxy – and another – and another – until the galaxies, consisting of hundreds of thousands, probably millions, maybe more, I am just estimating, are like single stars or points of light, and yet each contains within it multiple suns and their spheres of influence – and then the edge of the expanding universe – if you are adventurous, maybe you go past that edge, or maybe that is enough for today and you begin to come back down to your Self, step, by step, by step, by step, by step.

You can visit all of this space through this internal exercise. Did your consciousness actually extend to the reaches of the universe, or was this just an "exercise of the imagination?"

Did you actually bring your consciousness down to the reality of one of the atoms in your body, or was this just a fanciful "exercise of the imagination?" I will leave those questions for you to address.

The purpose of this exercise is to develop the ability to shift dimensions within yourself and the universe and to develop a sense of connection between your ego, your Self, and the surround of your Self.

(From *Re-humanizing Medicine: A Holistic Framework for Transforming Your Self, Your Practice and the Culture of Medicine*, by David Kopacz, MD, reproduced with permission from the author)

Bringing the Light of Inspiration into Your Life

Start by sitting comfortably, eyes closed or partly open.

Take three deep breaths, with each breath feel your body grow heavier. Imagine a Light above your head. Open a space in your heart, in your self – a space into which this light can enter. Imagine a ray of light coming down from this light source and entering in the top of your head.

As it comes in allow it to spread throughout your skull, to come down to the center of your head and to shine out throughout your brain and skull.

Next, allow the light to come down into your neck and shine out, filling up your vocal cords and spine with light. Now, allow the light to shine down into your heart, filling your heart and shining out throughout your chest and continuing down into your shoulders, arms, hands and fingers.

Next, allow the light to come down into your belly and shine throughout your innards.

Then allow the light to come down into your pelvis and shine out, filling your bones, your legs, down into your knees, your feet and into your toes. Allow this light to completely fill you up and relax into it.

Take three deep breaths and slowly open your eyes, now let this light that you let into your self come out to help and touch others during your day.



My Health Goals

Strategies to maintain your connection to something larger than yourself (God, higher power, community, nature).

Circle ONE strategy and set a goal:

- Time in nature Pray Meditate Practice gratitude
- Help others Give away time, things, or money Listen to music
- Serenity Prayer Read something inspirational Light a candle
- Practice forgiveness Take a walk Attend a spiritual/religious service
- Write a poem Take a photograph Draw or paint
- Ask for help Volunteer Be mindful Journal
- _____ _____ _____

My goal for the next week is: (SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time Bound. Example: I will walk at least 3 times this week for 15 minutes each, after I get home from work.)

Things that might get in my way: (Examples: weather, pain, time)

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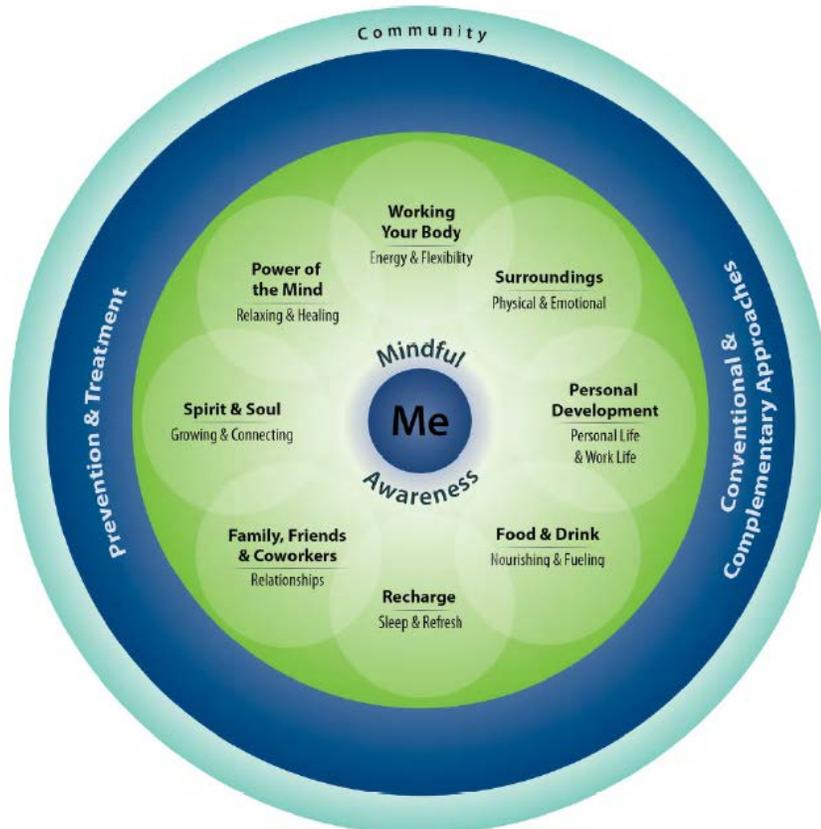
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Additional Resources for Improving your Spiritual Well-Being

Department of Veterans Affairs Hospital Chaplains:

[Google Search Video: "VA chaplain"](#)

VA Classes:

Chaplain led Grief and Loss group

The Hero's Journey Class

Books:

A Religion of One's Own: A Guide to Creating a Personal Spirituality in a Secular World, Thomas Moore

Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life, Thomas Moore

The Places that Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times, Pema Chodron

Praying Like a Woman, Nicola Slee

When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times, Pema Chodron

Iron John: A Book About Men, Robert Bly

Can You Drink the Cup? Henri Nouwen

Inner Revolution: Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness, Robert Thurman

Women in Praise of the Sacred: Centuries of Spiritual Poetry by Women, Jane Hirshfield

Love Poems from God: Twelve Sacred Voices from the East and West, Daniel Ladinsky

Space for God: Study and Practice of Spirituality and Prayer, Don Postema

The Soul is Here for its Own Joy: Sacred Poems from Many Cultures, edited Robert Bly

Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War, Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini

War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Edward Tick

Warrior's Return: Restoring the Soul After War, Edward Tick

On-line Reading:

“Spirituality and Trauma: Veterans and Professionals Working Together,”
<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/PTSD/professional/provider-type/community/fs-spirituality.asp>

“My HealtheVet: Spirituality Center,” https://www.myhealthevet.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/anonymous.portal?nfpb=true&pageLabel=healthyLiving&contentPage=healthy_living/spirituality_intro.htm

Military Veteran Resource Network: Spirituality,
<http://militaryveteranresourcenetwork.org/navigation-guides/topic-guide-spirituality>

“Moral Injury in the Context of War,” National Center for PTSD,
http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/co-occurring/moral_injury_at_war.asp

Videos

Make the Connection, videos and information for Veterans,
<http://maketheconnection.net/events/spirituality>

“Mantram Repetition Found to be Effective for PTSD”
http://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/news/research_news/bormann-033012.cfm

Class 8: Power of the Mind

Relaxing & Healing



Our mind can affect our body. Sometimes when we think about stressful things, our heart rate and blood pressure go up. We can use the power of our mind to lower blood pressure or control pain. We can learn to use the connection between our body, brain, and mind.

Warriors and athletes use the power of the mind to visualize a successful mission or event. Mind-body practices tap into the power of the mind to heal and cope.

To improve my mind-body health, I want to work on: _____

Your Mind is not Your Brain (but it still affects your body)

Our minds respond to everything that happens to us in life – pleasant or unpleasant.

Stressors can be defined as any type of change that causes physical, emotional or psychological strain. Although not all stressors are harmful or even negative, they all have an impact on our mind and body.

Our body responds to stressors in a few different ways:

- **Eustress, good stress**, is caused by things we enjoy or that are fun and exciting (e.g., adrenaline rush, sports, learning something new).
- **Acute Stress, short-term stress**, is caused by daily interactions and experiences (e.g., traffic, seeing old friends, meeting a deadline), it can be either positive or negative.
- **Chronic Stress**, when our lives are full of daily stressors that seem never-ending and overwhelming (e.g., high conflict relationships, negative work environment, social isolation).



Fight or Flight (Adrenaline Rush)

Our Body's Response to Acute Stress

- Stressors can trigger the body's response to perceived threat or danger, the "Fight-or-Flight" response.
- During the fight-or-flight reaction, stress hormones, like adrenalin and cortisol, are released.
- Our heart rate increases, digestion slows down, our thinking may slow down, and blood may rush to our arms and legs.
- Our body experiences an energy boost.
- Fight-or-flight is protective in times of danger, but sometimes our bodies forget to turn it off, like after combat or when daily work/relationship stressors are high.

When Fight-or-Flight Never Turns Off (Stress Related Illness)

Our Body's Response to Chronic Stress

Chronic stress produces an over-activated autonomic nervous system, depletes our energy reserves, and leads to physical symptoms of stress.

The first symptoms are relatively mild, like chronic headaches and increased susceptibility to colds. With more exposure to chronic stress, however, more serious health problems may develop. In fact, it's been estimated that as many as 90% of doctor's visits are for symptoms that are at least partially stress-related!

- Depression
- Heart disease
- Hyperthyroidism
- Obesity
- Anxiety
- Erectile dysfunction
- Tooth and gum disease
- Ulcers
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Muscle tension
- Indigestion
- Diabetes
- Auto-immune diseases
- Slow wound healing

Strategies to reduce the effects of stress by decreasing autonomic arousal:

- **Mindfulness**
- **Deep Breathing**
- **Practice of Gratitude**

"It takes a deliberate, willful act to be positive,"

(Deb Price, Primary Care Clinic Manager, Seattle, VAPSHCS)



An Introduction to Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of being aware of the present moment in a non-judgmental way. Mindfulness is a mind-body practice for regulating your breathing, managing intrusive thoughts, acknowledging unpleasant feelings and memories, and calming the mind and body. Anyone can do mindfulness, but it is not easy, the mind naturally wants to reach out toward things or to retreat from

things it does not like. This is the nature of the mind – to grasp for more pleasure and to reject more pain.

There are many physical and mental health benefits associated with mindfulness training and the VA as well as other sites are doing active research on how mindfulness can help Veterans improve their own health.

Basic Mindfulness Exercises

In the beginning, practice a mindfulness exercise for 2-5 minutes a day. You can gradually increase the amount of time.

Formal mindfulness classes generally recommend up to 45 minutes or more a day of practice.

Mindful Awareness of the Present Moment

Sit some place quiet where you won't be disturbed. Generally it is recommended that you sit upright with a straight back, but if pain won't allow that, sit however you are comfortable.

Close your eyes or partially close them, whichever is more comfortable.

Place one hand on your belly, take a deep breath all the way down into your belly and feel it expand and press outward against your hand.

Repeat this a few times. (At first it might be good to keep your hand on your belly the whole time, but eventually, once your body has learned the feeling, you don't have to keep your hand there).

Just focus on your breathing, deep, slow breaths in, and slow, steady breaths out. It is natural for your breathing to slow down when you bring your attention to it.

If a thought, feeling or image comes to you, practice non-attachment: allow it to exist in your consciousness without moving toward it or away from it. Sometimes people will use some imagery, like a thought is a leaf on the water or wind – and it blows this way and that. Acceptance of what is, of what you are experiencing is the goal of mindfulness.

You are not trying to have an empty mind; you are letting your mind expand by accepting what arises in it without trying to change it.



Mindful Awareness of the Body

Sit comfortably; take three deep breaths into your chest. Allow space to open up with each breath to allow more air to flow in. Bring your mind, your awareness to the space that you have created in your chest.

Isn't it interesting how your mind can find itself in the space of your chest? Your mind is not just in your head, where your brain is, your mind can travel throughout your body. Some traditions even suggest that the body is an extension of the mind into physical form.

Imagine your mind traveling throughout your body, imagine your awareness pervading throughout the physical substance of your body. Scientists say that physical matter, at the sub-atomic level, is mostly empty space – imagine your mind and consciousness filling up all this empty space around and within your molecules, atoms and electrons.

Now let's look at how your mind can influence the experience and even functioning of your body. Try to do this next part of the exercise without actually moving your muscles or body, just use your imagination and consciousness.

Imagine that your muscles are contracting and tightening...imagine space closing in around you, imagine your chest tightening, your breath constricting, your abdomen contracting, imagine tightness in your brain.

Now, imagine that your muscles are relaxing...imagine space opening up within and around you, imagine your chest opening, your breath relaxing into openness, your abdomen relaxing and opening, allow your brain to relax into openness.

Notice how distinctly different these two experiences are. Without even moving your body your mind can create vastly different experiences. This is the power of the mind.

Making Yourself More Capable of Life

Take a few deep breaths.

Relax into yourself and be curious about what arises.

Once a thought, emotion, or image arises, translate that into a color. This thought, emotion, or image is just one aspect of you, it is what you are feeling, thinking, seeing right now, but you are more than just this experience.

Imagine that you are a glass of water, and the color/experience is a drop of food coloring. Imagine that you are a kind of glass which can expand or contract, becoming larger or smaller.

Notice what happens to the intensity and saturation of the color when you contract. It gets more intense. Notice what happens when you expand. The same amount of color/experience is now in a larger volume and it becomes less intense, less saturated – it is still there, but it is not as intense.

You can use this exercise for pain, for negative thoughts, feelings and images, for depression, anxiety – it is particularly good for those times where you feel like you are overwhelmed and you just can't take anymore. You can't eliminate thoughts, feelings, images, but you can change how they affect you and how intense they are.

My Health Goals

Strategies to harness the power of my mind.

Circle ONE strategy and set a goal:

- Breathe Focus on one thing at a time Listen to music
- Observe my thoughts Write down worries Count my blessings
- Mindful meditation Limit distractions To Do list Take a walk
- Tell myself: “I’ll be ok, I can do it” Find the positive in a problem
- Call someone I care about Take a 5 minute break Ask for help
- _____ _____ _____

My goal for the next week is: (SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time Bound. Example: I will walk at least 3 times this week for 15 minutes each, after I get home from work.)

Things that might get in my way: (Examples: weather, pain, time)

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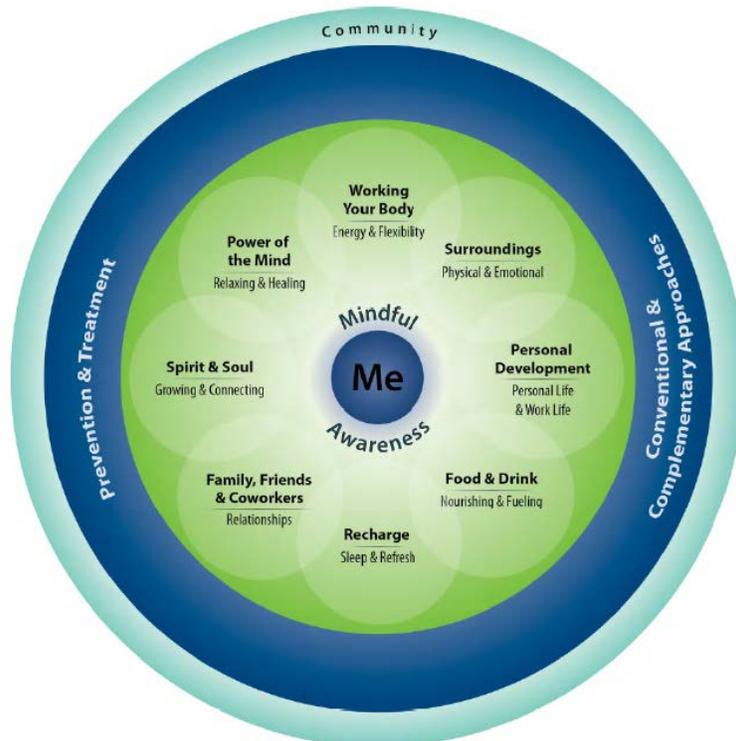
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Saturday		
Sunday		



Additional Resources to Access the Power of Your Mind:

VA Classes:

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction

Life Paths

Skills for living well with Chronic Pain

Mindfulness Downloads (5-15 minute mp3 downloads):

<http://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/Podcasts.asp>

REVIVE Study (Restoring Emotional Vitality in Veteran's Experience)

Ongoing Research Subjects with PTSD needed for training in either Cognitive Processing Therapy or Loving Kindness Meditation & Mindfulness, contact Nicole Bernardi, (206) 277-3538.

Books:

Full Catastrophe Living, Jon Kabat-Zinn

Get out of your mind and into your life, Stephen Hayes, PhD.

Yoga Nidra: A Meditative Practice for Deep Relaxation and Healing, Richard Miller, PhD, comes with a CD

The iRest Program for Healing PTSD: A Proven-Effective Approach to Using Yoga Nidra Meditation and Deep Relaxation Techniques to Overcome Trauma, Richard Miller, PhD

Videos:

"A Patient Centered Approach to: Power of the Mind,"

<http://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/multimedia-and-resources.asp>

PTSD Videos from VA: <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/materials/videos/index.asp>

Website:

Dr. Bormann's website on Mantram Meditation: www.jillbormann.com

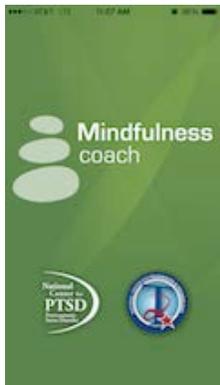
Apps:

Breathe2Relax



Mindfulness Coach:

http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/materials/apps/mobileapp_mindfulness_coach.asp



PTSD Coach: <https://mobile.va.gov/app/ptsd-coach>



The Holmes-Rahe - Social Readjustment Scale

Test yourself -

How many stressors have I experienced in the last year?

Life event	Life change units
Death of a spouse	100
Divorce	73
Marital separation	65
Imprisonment	63
Death of a close family member	63
Personal injury or illness	53
Marriage	50
Dismissal from work	47
Marital reconciliation	45
Retirement	45
Change in health of family member	44
Pregnancy	40
Sexual difficulties	39
Gain a new family member	39
Business readjustment	39
Change in financial state	38
Death of a close friend	37
Change to different line of work	36
Change in frequency of arguments	35
Major mortgage	32
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
Change in responsibilities at work	29

Life event	Life change units
Child leaving home	29
Trouble with in-laws	29
Outstanding personal achievement	28
Spouse starts or stops work	26
Beginning or end school	26
Change in living conditions	25
Revision of personal habits	24
Trouble with boss	23
Change in working hours or conditions	20
Change in residence	20
Change in schools	20
Change in recreation	19
Change in church activities	19
Change in social activities	18
Minor mortgage or loan	17
Change in sleeping habits	16
Change in number of family reunions	15
Change in eating habits	15
Vacation	13
Major Holiday	12
Minor violation of law	11

Score of 300+: At risk of illness.

Score of 150-299: Risk of illness is moderate (reduced by 30% from the above risk).

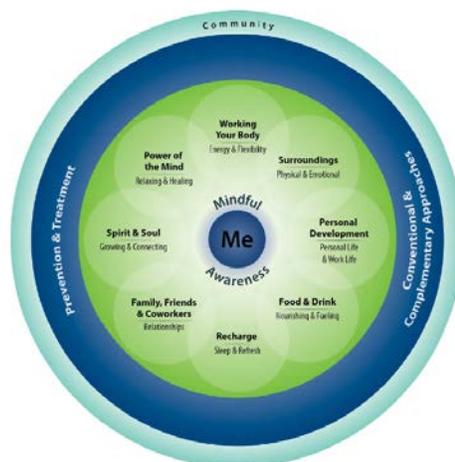
Score <150: Only have a slight risk of illness.

Source: The social readjustment rating scale, Holmes, T. H. and Rahe, R. H. (1967), Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 11 (2), 213 – 21.

Class 9: Bringing it Back Full Circle

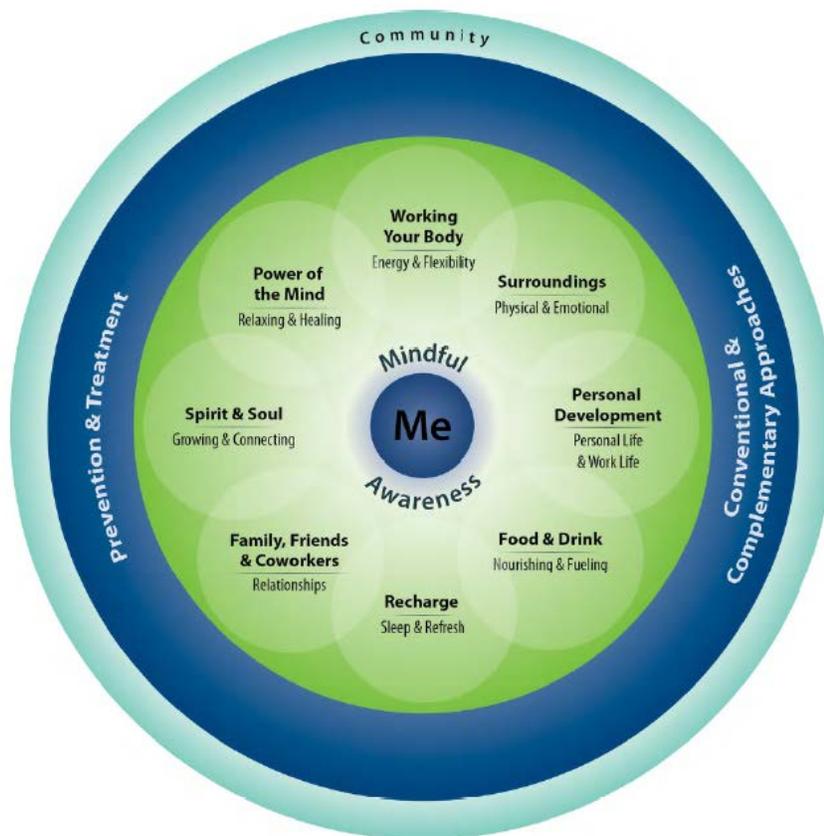


“The mind can be seen as a circle. There are corridors from the center that lead out in the four directions, the East (the mental), West (the physical), the North (the spiritual), and the South (the emotional). When awareness expands, we move toward the outer periphery of the circle...As we reach the outer periphery of the circle, paradoxically we are, in that moment, in the middle of the circle,” (Joseph Rael, *Being & Vibration*, 78-79).



The Circle of Health comes out of the national VA Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation. Transformation in the way we think about and the way we do health care is a lot of what this class is about.

If you look at the center of the Circle of Health, you will find *Me* – yourself – that is because you are the only person who can make changes in your life that promote Whole Health.



If you look out in the next ring, you find ***mindful awareness***. That is why we did mindfulness exercises each class, mindfulness is how you connect yourself to the 8 different dimensions of Whole Health.

Moving outwards, you find the eight dimensions of Whole Health that we have covered in this class.

Moving outward from there, it is only then that you encounter *prevention & treatment*.

A Model of Transformation

This model is about a **transformation** in health care. Usually in medicine, we consider the doctor, the medication and the surgery as the center of health care, but really these are things that should be on the periphery that you only turn to when needed.

When possible, you first turn your mindful awareness to the eight dimensions of Whole Health.

You'll notice that on the other side of the circle from **prevention & treatment**, you'll find **conventional & complementary approaches**, this means combining medications, doctors, and surgery with things that you can do on your own, or from complementary/integrative health providers. These are things like yoga, mindfulness training, tai chi, and acupuncture.

The next circle out is **community**, this is in the circle because you exist in a context. The worst possible thing of you if you have depression, PTSD, anxiety, diabetes, high blood pressure, if you are overweight, if you have heart disease, or chronic pain – actually, if you have any health problems at all – the worst thing for you to do is isolate, not leave the house, not open your heart to others, not be connected to others, not have a job or volunteer work that you do every week.

Every day you need a reason to get up and get going if you want to be a Whole Person and you want to have Whole Health. You need your community and your community needs you. It is time for you to **take it outside**, and remember what Yoda says: **“Do. Or do not. There is no try.”**

Ground Hog Day movie

In this movie, Bill Murray's character, Phil, is not a very happy person and he makes everyone else around him unhappy. He keeps making the same choices and keeps getting the same results. Then one day he wakes up and realizes that he is actually living the previous day over again. This keeps happening, again and again. At first he is freaked out, then frustrated. Then he begins to use this for

selfish reasons, trying to take advantage of knowing what will happen before others do. Eventually, he tires of this and he begins to use his situation to help others. Running down the street to catch a boy who falls out of it at the same time every day. Helping elderly ladies with a flat tire. As he changes what he does, other people change how they feel about him. He goes from being disliked, to being the most popular person in town.

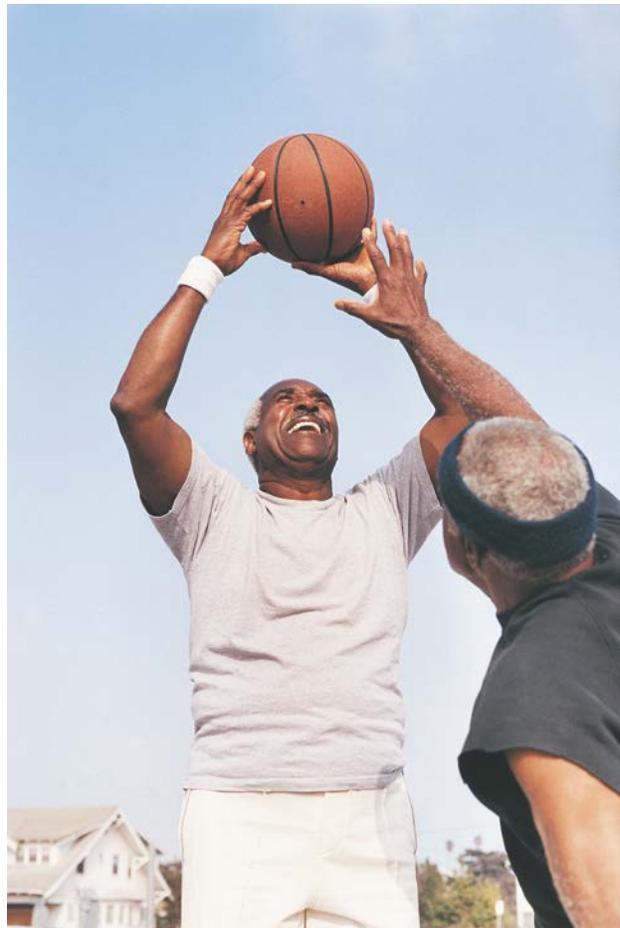
There are a few morals to this story. One is that you can be happier living to help others than focusing on only helping yourself. Another important moral is that if you change how you are living, you will change what happens in your life.

The Journey Continues

We have journeyed together, through the different dimensions of Whole Health: body, surroundings, personal development, food & drink, sleep, relationships, spirit & soul, and the power of the mind.

Hopefully, one of the things you have come to have a deeper appreciation for is that all these dimensions of your self are interconnected – when you start working on one dimension, you realize that it affects other dimensions.

Your journey is forward in life, and yet you move forward by circling around, bringing together the parts and pieces of your life.



“All journeys are ultimately made alone. Resign yourself to be alone, as all journeys require being alone. All journeys are made with others. Resign yourself to being in fellowship, because no journey is done completely alone,” (David Kopacz, *Hero’s Journey Class Workbook*).

No one can make your journey for you, and yet there are others (on their own journeys) all around you who can be your companions on the road.

As you ready yourself to finish this journey in the Whole Health Class, you will be going on alone, however, you have a choice to keep in touch with other Veterans in the class who are willing to share their contact details with you and continue on the Whole Health road with you.

Since we are moving around the Circle of Health, let’s circle back around and look at some things we have covered. The best way to do this is for you to ask yourself some questions:

- *How would I explain how each of the dimensions of Whole Health are interconnected?*
- *In which domains do my strengths lie?*
- *In which domains do I face a lot of challenges?*
- *How can I improve my ability to define SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time Bound)?*
- *How can I set goals that have short-term, medium-term and long-term goal posts?*
- *What can I do for my health – every day, every week, every month?*
- *How do I intend to use the Circle of Health going forward?*

Integrating Your Self Mindfulness Exercise:

Start by sitting comfortably.

Close your eyes if that feels comfortable, or at least relax them and partially close them.

Take a deep breath into the center of your body and breathe out.

Breathe in, all the way into your belly, bringing in fresh oxygen into your body.

Breathe out, emptying your lungs, letting go of carbon dioxide.

Breathe in again, deep into your belly.

Breathe out, exhaling as completely as possible.

Bring your awareness to your belly as you breathe.

Next, shift your awareness to your chest, feel the breath move in and out of your chest.

Now, bring your awareness down into your hips, feel your body sinking into the chair.

Bring your awareness into your shoulders, down your arms, elbows, forearms, into your hands, and out to the tips of your fingers, all the while, breathing deeply and gently.

Next, bring your awareness to your neck and throat, feel the breath coming in through your throat.

Move your awareness up to your face. Relax the muscles of your face, your chin, your cheeks, your lips, your forehead, your eyes, around your ears, and even your scalp.

Now, move your awareness back down to your legs, moving down from your hips, to your knees, your calves, your shins, your ankles, down into your feet, and to the tips of your toes.

You have now moved through all these different parts of your body, but your body is not really in pieces, in it is a whole thing. Bring your awareness around the edges of your body. Pick a color, like a highlighter or a glowing light, draw a line all the way around your whole body, bringing it all together into wholeness. Imagine breathing with your whole body, with your breath moving through your whole body, from head to toe as you breathe in, and then back up as you breathe out.

Take a few more deep breaths with your whole self.

Slowly open your eyes, take a breath, and share anything that you noticed.

My Health Goals

You have discovered strategies to improve your Whole Health in every dimension.

Circle ONE strategy and set a goal:



Working Your Body

Energy & Flexibility



Surroundings

Physical & Emotional



Personal Development

Personal Life & Work Life



Food & Drink

Nourishing & Fueling



Recharge

Sleep & Refresh



Family, Friends & Coworkers

Relationships



Spirit & Soul

Growing & Connecting



Power of the Mind

Relaxing & Healing

What Matters to Me – What do I Want My Health for? _____

My goal for the next week is: (SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time Bound. Example: I will walk at least 3 times this week for 15 minutes each, after I get home from work.)

Things that might get in my way: (Examples: weather, pain, time)

What I can do to overcome these things: (Examples: exercise indoors, walk with a friend) _____

I believe I can reach my goal: (Circle the number that matches how confident you feel.) _____

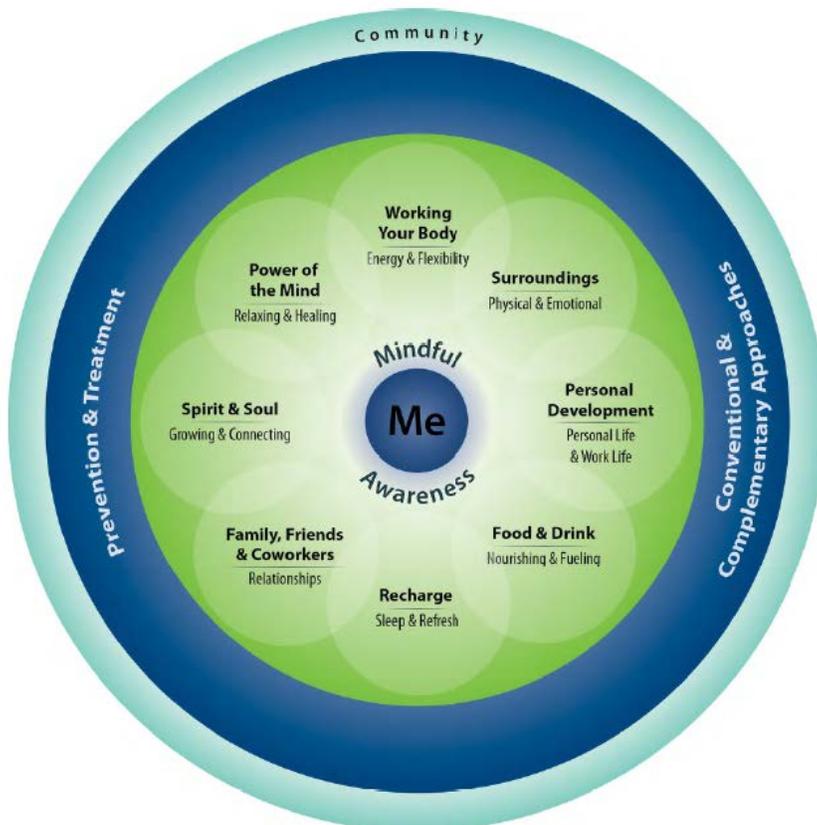
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at All Sure			Somewhat Sure				Very Sure		

My Progress Report

for week beginning:
(date)

Goal:

Day of week	Action Taken	Comments (how I felt, challenges, successes)
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		



Additional Resources to help you move towards Whole Health:

Veteran Volunteer Opportunities:

Practicing What Matters Most:

[Google Search Volunteer Programs](#)

Apps for Vets:

[Google Search VA Mobile Apps](#)

Videos

[Google Search Patient Centered Care Videos on YouTube](#)

Additional Mindfulness Resources



Mindfulness is the practice of being aware of the present moment in a non-judgmental way. Mindfulness is a mind-body practice for regulating your breathing, managing intrusive thoughts, acknowledging unpleasant feelings and memories, and calming the mind and body. There are many physical and mental health benefits associated with mindfulness training. The VA as well as other sites are doing active research on how mindfulness can help Veterans improve their own health.

In the beginning, practice a mindfulness activity for just a few minutes a day. You can gradually increase the amount of time. Formal mindfulness classes generally recommend as much as 45 minutes or more a day of practice. Start small, with what feels manageable to you. Remember, developing mindfulness skills is a lifelong pursuit.

My goal for Mindfulness Practice is: _____

The Way Forward is to Stop Moving Away

All people have negative things in their lives that they would rather not think of, even more so for many Veterans. The natural impulse is to push away a negative event, thought, feeling or memory. However, this can actually give the thing you are pushing away more energy. Mindfulness teaches a practice of accepting your self, accepting your past, your thoughts, your feelings, your memories. When you stop moving away from something, you actually have the possibility of moving forward.

Making More Space for Yourself

One of the things that happens when we have a negative experience is that we tighten up, contract, and try to push away whatever is bothering us. If this is a fly or mosquito, you might be able to get away from it. However if you are trying to get away from yourself, you will only create more suffering in doing so.

You can think of your consciousness as a container. You cannot control what is going to show up in that container, but you can control whether you accept what shows up. You can also control whether the container is small, tight, without much room for your experience, or you can control if the container is large, vast, spacious, with plenty of room for your experience. In essence, this means making yourself more capable of a range of experiences.



Yoga Nidra

This is a form of yoga that is very focused on mindfulness and inner work, as much or more so than in the outer work of physical yoga poses. Richard Miller, PhD has developed a program that he calls Integrative Restoration, or i-Rest, and he has

done research with Veterans using his program. We'll just mention two key aspects of this work that is very pertinent to using the positive power of the mind.

The Inner Resource

By connecting to this part of ourselves, the inner resource, we can tap into internal support for ourselves. You can think of it a little like opening up the expansiveness of your self. Dr. Miller doesn't specifically define the inner resource, so each person can imagine it to be what is most supportive to them. For spiritual people, it could be a guardian angel, saint, or even God. For others it could be a favorite grandparent, a pet, a best friend (could be living or deceased). For others it could be a place, or an object, a color or a sound or scent. Really it can be anything you find supportive.

Holding Opposites

Another aspect of Yoga Nidra is expanding so that you can hold two opposite (thoughts, feelings, images) in your consciousness at the same time. This leads to a change in your experience of life. For instance, you might start by being aware of the physical sensation of your right hand, then of your left hand, then of both hands at the same time. Similarly, you can be aware of a thought or feeling, say sadness, and then be aware of the opposite, happiness, then try to hold both of these feelings in your awareness at the same time. It is a challenging exercise, but it gives us a greater depth and capacity for the experiences of life.

Mantram Meditation (based on the work of Jill Bormann PhD, RN)

How to Choose a Mantram*

Much care should be taken in choosing a mantram.

*A *mantram* is a spiritual word, phrase, or brief prayer that we repeat silently to ourselves to calm the body, quiet the mind and improve concentration to restore the spirit.

Take your time and choose it wisely. Avoid words that evoke negative associations or bad memories. Choose one that appeals to you or offers strength and support. Choose one that is compatible with your religious background and/or spiritual beliefs. Some people have no difficulty choosing a mantram, such

as when a word or phrase jumps out at them immediately. Others have to “try it on” and practice repeating it silently for a few days or even weeks, to see how it feels, only to discover that when they decided to pick a new one—they couldn’t! Their minds automatically reverted to repeating the first one! Using that mantram had already become a habit.

Using a Mantram for Slowing Down

Our culture values speed and doing many things at once or multi-tasking. People groan that there are “not enough hours in the day” to accomplish all they want. Such thinking promotes a sense of urgency and the need to hurry through life. Slowing down involves discrimination. Yes, there are many things to attend to—daily maintenance of household and career, caring for relationships with family and friends. Discrimination is needed to decide what is most important, and then do those things at a moderate pace to avoid carelessness and error. Contrary to what most of us believe, slowing down means efficiency! One makes fewer mistakes, has fewer accidents, and becomes more creative.

Discrimination really means setting priorities and learning to “let go” of the non-essentials. This alone takes time for reflection and evaluation, and for some people, it involves risk-taking. It may feel threatening to evaluate one’s pace and realize the need to change and slow down. Nevertheless, slowing down involves making a conscious effort to choose wisely each day and in each activity—all aspects of life. The end result is living more fully, consciously, and intentionally.



Using a Mantram for Developing One-Pointed Attention or Mindfulness

Mantram repetition forces the mind inherently to become one-pointed with focused attention and serves to raise awareness of the thinking process. Many times, people are unaware of their thoughts and how poor decisions and bad habits are made. The mantram is a very concrete, practical tool whereby “you know when you are repeating it, and you know when you are *not*.” Each time your mind wanders and you bring it back to focus on the mantram, you have an opportunity to increase mindfulness and your ability to control attention. Attention, explained in this way, is a valuable resource that is often wasted. Just as sunlight can be focused through a magnifying glass to create a laser sharp point capable of burning a leaf, attention can be focused on completing one task at a time with efficiency and carefulness.

Stages of Mantram Practice

Mechanical – Experiential - Habitvi

List of Recommended Mantrams

Mantrams (pronunciation)

Om mani padme hum

(Ohm mah-nee pahd-may hume)

Namo Butsaya (Nah-mo Boot-see-yah)

My God and My All

Maranatha (Mah-rah-nah-tha)

Kyrie Eleison (Kir-ee-ay Ee-lay-ee-sone)

Christe Eleison (Kreest-ay Ee-lay-ee-sone)

Jesus, Jesus

Hail Mary or Ave Maria

Description

An invocation to the jewel (Self), in the lotus of the heart

I bow to the Buddha

St. Francis of Assisi's phrase

Lord of the Heart (Aramaic)

Lord have mercy

Christ have mercy

Son of God

Mother of Jesus

<i>Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me</i>	Jesus Prayer
<i>Rama</i> (Rah-mah)	Eternal joy within (Gandhi's mantram)
<i>Om Namah Shivaya</i> (Ohm Nah-mah Shee-vah-yah)	Invocation to beauty and fearlessness
<i>Om Prema</i> (Ohm Pray-Mah)	A call for universal love
<i>Om Shanti</i> (Ohm Shawn-tee)	Invocation to eternal peace
<i>Shalom</i> (Shah-lome)	Peace, completeness
<i>So Hum</i> (So Hum)	I am that Self within
<i>Barukh Atah Adonoi</i> (Bah-rookh At-tah Ah-doh-nigh)	Blessed art Thou, King of the Universe
<i>Ribono Shel Olam</i> (Ree-boh-no Shel O-lahm)	Master of the Universe
<i>Bismallah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim</i> (Beese-mah-lah ir-Rah-mun ir-Rah-heem)	In the name of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate
<i>O Wakan Tanka</i> (Wah-Kahn Tahn-Kah)	Great Spirit

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