

## Module 1: Caregiver Self Care



In this module, we will focus on the importance of your role as a Family Caregiver and what you can do for yourself to keep life fulfilling and happy for you and your family. We know that caregiving does not occur in a vacuum. In addition to being the Family Caregiver of a Veteran, you may also look out for other family members, parents, siblings, in-laws and children. And, you may have a job, too.

We will share with you information about steps you can take to keep yourself physically and emotionally healthy. We also will offer you some tips related to your roles in meeting your family's needs and in the work place. A theme to remember: resources exist all around you that can be of help to you and the Veteran you care for.

Over the past decade there has been more attention to the important role that Family Caregivers play in the lives of both Veterans and non-Veterans. We have learned a lot about what helps a Caregiver carry on this valuable role and how Caregivers themselves need support.

## Staying Healthy

### Why Is YOUR Health So Important?

Being a Caregiver requires stamina and good health. The journey is more of a marathon than a sprint and you need to be in the best condition you can be. Taking care of *you* is essential to your own well-being, and is crucial for the Veteran's health and comfort.

Because caregiving can be very demanding, Caregivers often don't exercise enough, don't eat a healthy diet, or delay seeking health care for themselves. Yet the demands of caregiving are precisely why a healthy lifestyle is so important. If you are in good physical and mental health, you will be able to handle the challenges that present each day and provide the best care possible to the Veteran. If you ignore your own health, you risk becoming ill. Maintaining your own health is an investment that will pay off for your whole family.

### Keys to Staying Healthy

In this section we will take a closer look at the following actions you can take now to "take care of YOU:"

- ★ Eat well.
- ★ Be physically active.
- ★ Prevent back injury.
- ★ Sleep enough.
- ★ Get preventive health services.



## Eating Well

Nutrition affects physical and emotional health. Proper diet helps protect the Caregiver from stress, while poor nutrition can lead to lower immunity and disease. Poor nutrition leads to fatigue, illness and disease. Small changes in diet can have benefits for health and wellbeing



You may be asking yourself, “With a very busy schedule, how can I eat well?” Or, “Where do I find the time to cook a proper meal?” Planning menus and making shopping lists ahead of time helps a lot. It makes grocery shopping quicker and preparation time shorter. Look for tasty, easy to prepare meals. When you cook, make extra and freeze portions to use later.

## Nutrition Basics

Understanding the basics of good nutrition will help you navigate through the overwhelming amount of information about what you should and shouldn’t eat. The information below will help you in making good choices.

### Salt

Nearly all Americans consume more salt than is recommended. Since sodium added during the processing of foods provides more than three-fourths of total intake, it’s important to read the sodium content on the food label on the back of the product when you are grocery shopping. Decreasing salt (sodium chloride) intake is advisable to reduce the risk of high blood pressure.

The general goal is for adults to aim to consume less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day (about one teaspoon of salt). Intake should be reduced to 1500 milligrams for persons age 51 and older, and those of any age who are African American or have hypertension, diabetes or chronic kidney disease. This applies to about half of the U.S. population, including children and the majority of adults.

## Saturated Fat

Saturated fats come from animal products such as meat, dairy products, and from coconut oil, palm/palm kernel oil and hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated oils. Some products that may be made with these oils are: fried chicken and fish, cakes, pies and cookies. In general, saturated fats are solid at room temperature. Saturated fats can raise blood cholesterol levels which are linked to higher risks of heart disease and stroke. Replace saturated fats in your diet with monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. Also try to consume less than 300mg of dietary cholesterol each day.

*Recommended goal is for less than 10% of your total daily calories to come from fat.*



Saturated fats come from animal products such as meat, dairy products, and from coconut oil, palm/palm kernel oil, and hydrogenated vegetable oils.



Some products that may be made with hydrogenated vegetable oils are: fried chicken and fish, cakes, pies, and cookies.



### Carbohydrates

Reducing intake of added sugars (especially sugar-sweetened beverages) may be helpful in weight control and balancing overall nutrition. A combined approach of reducing the intake of sugar and baked goods made with white flour will actually reduce your appetite, allowing for better weight control.

### Whole Grains

The goal is to eat at least three servings per day of whole grains, preferably by replacing foods with refined grains (e.g. white flour) with foods made with whole grains.

### Fruits, Vegetables, Dairy and Protein

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fruits/Vegetables | To meet your need for vitamins and minerals a range of 5-13 servings of fruits and vegetables each day is recommended.                                         |
| Dairy             | Most people need 2 to 3 cups of non-fat or low-fat milk, cheese, or yogurt each day.                                                                           |
| Protein           | Choose lean meat, poultry without skin, fish and dry beans and peas. Often, they are the choices lowest in fat. The suggested serving is 2-3 proteins per day. |

### Maintain a Balanced Diet

Here are some nutritional tips from ChooseMyPlate.gov to help you maintain a balanced diet. For more information go to:

<http://www.choosemyplate.com>

#### Balance Calories –

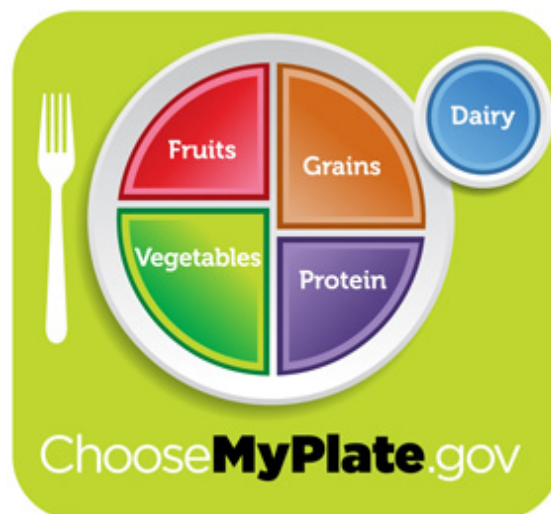
- ★ enjoy food but eat less,
- ★ avoid oversized portions

#### Foods to Increase –

- ★ make half your plate fruits and vegetables,
- ★ make at least half your grains whole grains,
- ★ switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk

#### Foods to Reduce –

- ★ compare sodium in foods like soup, bread and frozen meals
- ★ choose foods with lowest amount of sodium
- ★ drink water instead of sugary drinks.



### Nutrition Tips

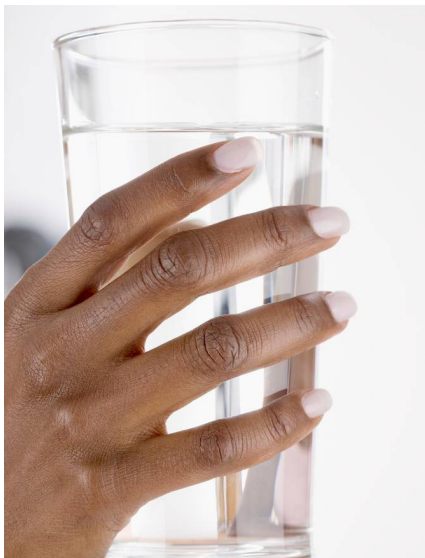
Try to stock up on healthy snacks and try not to purchase unhealthy ones.

If you usually eat on the run, have fresh fruits, vegetables and proteins (like cheese wedges, roasted unsalted nuts or meat slices) ready in your kitchen to grab and go.



If you have five minutes, it really helps to wash and chop some healthy vegetables ahead of time, and then they'll be ready for you for a snack or when it's time to cook.

With everything you have to do, you may find yourself rushing through meals. This can cause overeating, because your brain doesn't get the chance to register the fact that your stomach is full. By slowing down and taking time to savor your food, you can reduce the risk of overeating and enhance your physical and emotional health.



### Water

Water is a wonderful drink whenever you are thirsty. Bodies, particularly when stressed (as Caregivers' bodies often are), require water. Water cleanses, refreshes and also cuts down on the urge to indulge in mindless snacking or overeating for comfort. If you find yourself eating too much at a meal, drinking a full glass of water before the meal may work for you. This helps your brain register that your stomach is getting full. It will help you feel full with normal portions.

### A Few More Tips

- ★ Eat multiple small meals throughout the day, rather than three large meals.
- ★ Don't skip meals.
- ★ If you aren't sure you are eating properly, keep a journal and review this with your health care professional.

## Physical Activity – Move Around!

You don't have to go to a gym to get the benefits of physical activity. The benefits of physical activity include: reduced stress, increased alertness, better sleep and more energy. Any way you move counts!

You can choose activities that are appealing and meaningful to you such as:

- ★ Stepping outside to do a little gardening.
- ★ Taking a brisk walk around the block.
- ★ Exercising to a DVD or video at home when you have time.
- ★ Doing every day chores has a health benefit.
- ★ Listening to music while doing chores can help.

*Five minutes of almost any physical activity  
offers benefits lasting hours afterward.*

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### Walking

Walking is particularly good. It provides both exercise and relaxation; can be done almost anywhere; for any length of time.

One way to increase the amount of walking in your day is to walk rather than drive short distances, or to park at the far end of the parking lot. Taking the stairs rather than the elevator is another good idea.

## Exercise

- ★ Five minutes of activity several times a day adds up to a good plan for obtaining moderate exercise.
- ★ Moderate exercise improves blood flow, enhances energy and diminishes risk for disease and injury.
- ★ Try to walk a total of 20 minutes a day, three days a week to start, and build up to 30 minutes, five days a week.

What activities do you, or can you start to perform every day that will keep you moving for at least five minutes?

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What small changes can you make to increase the amount of walking you do? For example: "Instead of emailing the co-worker two cubicles over, I can walk over to speak to her."

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Take a moment to write down types of extended exercise you can begin incorporating into your schedule starting now? (Biking? Running? What else?)

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## Protecting Your Back

Giving physical care increases the risk of getting a back injury. Lifting or helping a person shift from one place to another or moving a heavy or awkward object can seriously strain the back. The good news is that using back-protecting skills works.

The key is planning the lift. It's good to take these steps before starting:



1. Think through the whole move—plot it out.
2. Size up whether moving the object or person is truly manageable—if you can't comfortably handle the lift, you shouldn't do it.
3. Identify any obstacles in your way and remove them.
4. Bend your knees and lift with your legs, not your back.
5. Keep the object balanced as you lift.

## Getting a Good Night's Sleep

As a Family Caregiver, you may be sacrificing your own sleep needs for the needs of your family, including caring for the Veteran. Lack of sleep can make you less alert, impair your productivity and ability to pay attention, reduce your ability to remember new information and slow your reaction times.

*Most healthy adults, for best performance,  
need seven or eight  
hours of sleep every night.*



Experts say we need to make sleep a priority and put it on our “to do” lists like any other important task. Sleep is not what you do when everything else is done, rather it is essential and means leaving some things undone. Too little sleep is linked to:

- ★ Car accidents.
- ★ Obesity due to an increased appetite caused by sleep deprivation.
- ★ Diabetes and heart problems.
- ★ Depression.

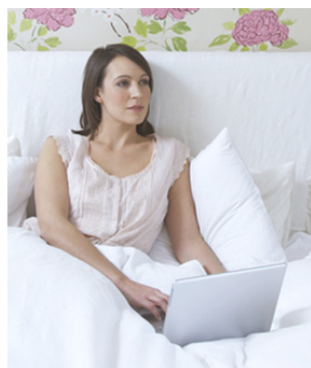
### Tips for Better Sleep

To open the door to better sleep, sleep specialists recommend having consistent sleep-and-wake schedules, even on weekends, and offer the following tips:

- ★ An hour or so before you expect to fall asleep, enjoy a regular, relaxing bedtime routine such as soaking in a hot bath or listening to soothing music.
- ★ Submersing in warm water, or allowing it to flow over your body, is a known relaxant.
- ★ Taking a bath or shower before bed prepares the mind and body for deep sleep.
- ★ Create a sleep-friendly environment—a place that’s dark, quiet and cool with a comfortable mattress and pillows.
- ★ Using meditation or relaxation recordings helps some people sleep.
- ★ White noise machines, or recordings of nature sounds, like the ocean, also can help.



*Rid your bedroom of "sleep stealers" that can keep you awake like watching TV, using a computer, or reading a book.*



### Exercise and sleep

Exercise regularly during the day. While exercising regularly will help you to sleep, it's usually best not to exercise close to bedtime, as this may keep you awake.



### Bedtime snacks and sleep

It's generally best to finish eating a few hours before going to bed.

- ★ Some people find that eating a small bedtime snack of sleep-promoting foods helps such as carbohydrates (like bananas or toast) or food containing tryptophan (like turkey or milk) is helpful.
- ★ Foods containing caffeine, such as coffee or chocolate, can keep you awake if you have them within a few hours of bedtime.



## Preventive Health

Preventive health care like vaccinations and screenings, help you stay healthy and identify health problems early. Your family history will give your doctor some clues about the screenings you might need. Catching a problem early will help you take care of it before it impacts your health and takes away from your ability to provide care for the Veteran at home.



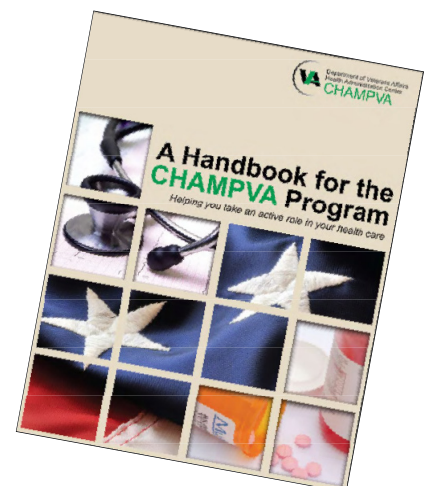
Most Caregivers are very diligent about the Veteran's doctor's appointments but may postpone scheduling their own. Some Caregivers haven't been able to afford medical care for themselves. Now, with access to The Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA), eligible primary Family Caregivers will have access to the health care they need to stay healthy and identify health problems early.

### CHAMPVA Program

CHAMPVA is a comprehensive health care program in which the VA shares the cost of covered health care services and supplies with eligible beneficiaries.

*A Handbook for the CHAMPVA Program is available at <http://www.va.gov/hac>. It provides information on a wide range of covered services. The covered preventive services include:*

- ★ Immunizations and vaccines (e.g., that annual flu shot)
- ★ Cardiovascular screenings
- ★ Cholesterol screening
- ★ Diabetes screening
- ★ Mammograms
- ★ Pap test
- ★ Pelvic exam
- ★ Cancer screening (breast, colorectal, skin, prostate, testicular, thyroid)



## High Blood Pressure

### What is Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is a measurement of the force applied to the walls of the arteries as the heart pumps blood through the body. The pressure is determined by the force and amount of blood pumped, and the size and flexibility of the arteries. Blood pressure is continually changing depending on activity, temperature, diet, emotional state, posture, physical state and medication use.

### How do you get checked for high blood pressure?

Checking your blood pressure is simple. Your provider places a fabric cuff around your upper arm and pumps it full of air. Your provider then listens to your heartbeat while the air lets out of the cuff.



### Follow these steps to help your provider correctly measure your blood pressure:

- ★ Wear a short-sleeved shirt or blouse.
- ★ Empty your bladder.
- ★ For at least 30 minutes before your appointment, *don't*:
  - ★ Smoke
  - ★ Do any vigorous activity
  - ★ Drink caffeine (in coffee, tea, or cola)
- ★ Sit down and relax with your feet on the floor and your back supported for at least 5 minutes before your blood pressure is checked.
- ★ Don't talk while your blood pressure is being checked.

### What do your blood pressure numbers mean?

Blood pressure is measured by two numbers.

The first (or top) number--"systolic"--is the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart beats. The second (or bottom) number--"diastolic"--is the pressure in your blood vessels between heartbeats.



Your provider will read this blood pressure as  
**"120 over 80"**

**If your blood pressure is normal**, that's great! You should have it rechecked every year or so to be sure it stays within the normal range.

**If your blood pressure is pre-high or high**, it should be rechecked to determine whether you have hypertension. Ask your provider the following questions:

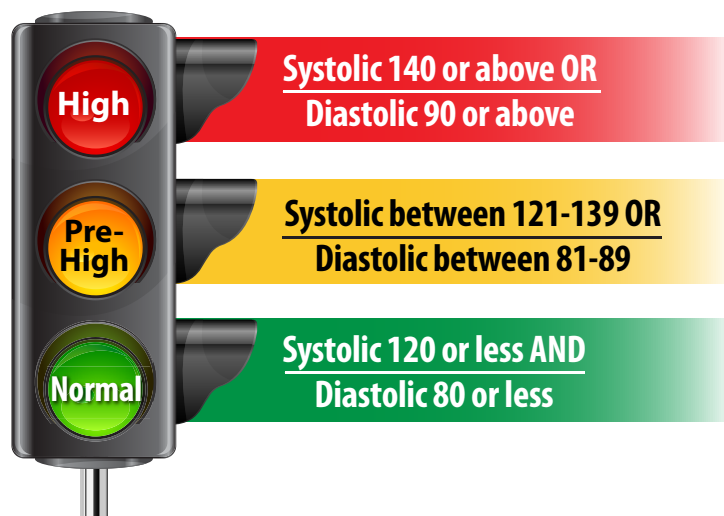
- ★ When should I have my blood pressure checked again?
- ★ Do I need treatment for high blood pressure?

### Why is high blood pressure dangerous?

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against your blood vessels. If this pressure rises and stays high over time, it is called hypertension ("Hi-pur-TEN-shun"). *If it is not controlled, high blood pressure can cause:*

- ★ Stroke
- ★ Kidney problems
- ★ Heart failure
- ★ Heart attack
- ★ Eye problems

Most people with high blood pressure feel healthy and don't have symptoms. The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure checked.



### What can you do to prevent or control high blood pressure?

1. **Quit smoking and/or chewing tobacco**—Ask your provider for help with quitting.
2. **Achieve and maintain a healthy weight**—If you are overweight, ask your provider for help with a plan to lose weight.
3. **Be physically active**—"Physical activity" includes any activity that raises your heart rate, such as brisk walking, working in the house or yard, or playing sports. Do activity for 10 minutes or more at a time. Aim for at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of activity each week.
4. **Reduce salt (sodium) in your diet**—Read food labels. Choose and prepare foods that are low in sodium or are sodium-free. Ask to see a registered dietitian if you need help with a plan.
5. **Limit alcohol**—Men should have no more than 2 drinks per day. Women should have no more than 1 drink per day.

### What else can you do?

Your provider may prescribe medicine to help lower your blood pressure.

- ★ Take your medicine every day, or as directed by your provider.
- ★ If your blood pressure numbers get lower, it's because your medicine is working. Don't stop it or take a lower dose unless your provider says you should.

Here are some questions to ask your provider:

- ★ Is my blood pressure under good control?
- ★ How often should I have my blood pressure checked?
- ★ What is a healthy weight for me?
- ★ Is it safe for me to start doing regular physical activity?



## Your Emotional Health

### Why Emotional Health is Important

When challenging things happen, emotional health lets you bounce back and move on. Most of us take emotional and mental health for granted and only focus on it when problems occur. But like physical health, it requires attention to build and maintain.

#### *Caregiving is a stressful job!*

A Caregiver's emotional health is very important. Chronic stress that doesn't go away can lead to health problems. There are many different tools that can help you achieve balance in your life, with time to relax, enjoy relationships, work and have fun.

Let's talk about things Caregivers can do to maintain their emotional health. First, ask for help. Reach out to social contacts. Get some respite from the day-to-day stress and seek out support groups.



### Ask For Help

Sometimes Caregivers have a difficult time saying they need help. They're expected to be, or expect themselves to be, the strong ones, taking care of others' needs. But one of the best things a Caregiver can do to maintain emotional health is to ask for help.

There's no shame in letting others know that you need assistance. A great place to start is in your faith community, your neighborhood or social groups where you already have a connection to others. Support might come in the form of direct help with care, or assistance with meals or chores around the house. Having supportive people in one's life can make all the difference in an emergency.

Who will you ask for help?

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### Reach Out to Social Contacts

A five-minute break to touch base with a compassionate friend, relative or neighbor, even by phone, or e-mail can lift your spirits.

Caregiving can feel lonely and isolating. Keeping up social contacts helps a lot in staying well. Hearing the sound of others' voices, reading their supportive words, or sharing thoughts with a kindred spirit requires only a short time in a busy caregiving day. Yet, this regular contact maintains your social support network.



Who will you call?

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### Get Some Respite

Respite means having someone stand in for you so that you can take a break. Stepping away from caregiving for an hour or two, a full day or a week can help to relieve stress and restore your sense of well-being, when you know that the Veteran is in good hands during your absence.

The VA provides enhanced respite support for Veterans and their primary Caregivers enrolled in the new Caregiver program as part of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. VA respite options include:

- ★ In-home respite, when someone comes into your home to provide caregiving for the Veteran while you are away.
- ★ Adult day programs, where the Veteran can participate in a full day of programs and socialize.
- ★ Out-of-home respite at the VAMC, VA Community Living Centers, or assisted living communities and community nursing homes.

What resources will you use?

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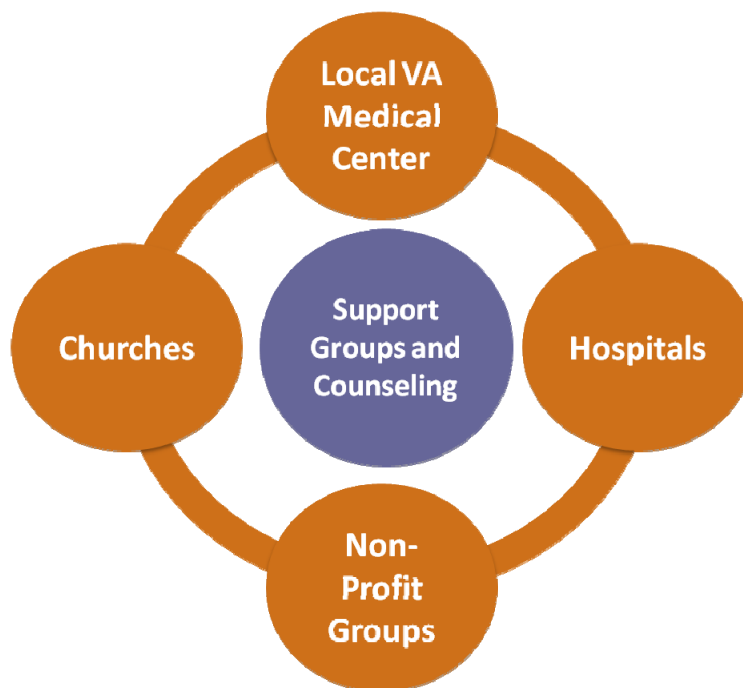
## Seek Out Support Groups

Your local VA Medical Center, churches, non-profit groups, community hospitals and other health care providers offer support groups specifically for Caregivers.

Support groups are safe havens for exploring and expressing grief, fear, guilt, anger and loss, joys and sharing coping skills. They are also great places to exchange caregiving resources. A social worker or other professional often leads the group.

Individual psychological counseling provides crucial support for some Caregivers. Many Caregivers find the combination of attending a support group and getting private counseling helps a lot in managing stress.

In the Program of Comprehensive Assistance, primary and secondary Family Caregivers will be eligible to participate in individual and group therapy, counseling and peer support groups offered at the VA Medical Center. The counseling provided for the Family Caregiver is independent and not connected to the Veteran's care.



What support groups will you reach out to?

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## Symptoms of Stress

Stress is both a mental and physical reaction to events upsetting the balance in our lives. You might think there's nothing you can do about your stress level. But you really can control lots more than you first think. Taming stress is a matter of taking charge of your thoughts and how you deal with problems; controlling your schedule and seeking help from others. Many Caregivers also find relaxation techniques useful in reducing stress and feelings of burden.

Recognizing stress is the first step in relieving it. Here is a summary of some physical and emotional effects of stress.

### Self-Check

Are you experiencing any of these symptoms of stress? Check all that apply to you.

- |                                                                   |                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headaches                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Irritability          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neck and shoulder tightness              | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Forgetfulness         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trouble sleeping                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor concentration    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weight change                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Low productivity      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stomach upsets                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Negative attitude     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fear and worry                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Confusion             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mood swings                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Weariness             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crying spells                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Boredom               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increased use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco | <input type="checkbox"/> Feelings of isolation |
|                                                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> High blood pressure   |



How are you coping with your stress? Check all that apply to you.

- |                                                                                |                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deep breathing or other relaxation techniques         | <input type="checkbox"/> Accept help from friends and family when offered |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time management                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Meditation                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Respite care to get breaks                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Exercise                                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Humor                                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Reward yourself                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stay in touch with friends                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Set limits                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Join a support group                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> See a therapist                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Read a book                                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to music that lightens your mood          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Keep engaging in activities that are important to you |                                                                           |

### Relieving Stress

Probably the simplest way to reduce your stress is to do something you enjoy and find relaxing. Some of these might work well in your life.

- ★ Go for a walk
- ★ Spend time outside
- ★ Take a long, hot bath
- ★ Play with a pet
- ★ Work in your garden
- ★ Curl up with a good book
- ★ Listen to relaxing music
- ★ Sweat out tension with a good workout

### Relaxation Techniques

You may also find it helpful to do some simple relaxation techniques like these. They may be done independently or in combination.

- ★ Breathing Exercises
- ★ Muscle Relaxation
- ★ Imagery Meditation
- ★ Mindfulness Meditation
- ★ Journaling



## Breathing Exercises

Breathing deeply is a quick way to relax. You can do it almost any place and time you need to relieve stress. Deep breathing helps maintain a sense of calm and it's part of almost all relaxation and meditation techniques. The key is to breathe deeply from your abdomen, rather than shallowly from your lungs, and get as much fresh air and oxygen into your lungs as possible.

### Instructions:

1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
2. Put one hand on your stomach (and the other on your chest if possible).
3. Feel your breathing for a short time, noticing the rise and fall of your stomach.
4. Breathe in (inhale) deeply through your nose. As you breathe in, the hand on your stomach should rise (and the one on your chest should move very little).
5. Breathe out (exhale) through your mouth—push out as much air as you can and feel your stomach tighten as it flattens. Again the hand on your stomach should move (your chest shouldn't move much).
6. Be sure that you empty out all the air and then pause.
7. Try to inhale to the count of 10 and then exhale to the count of 10—this helps to slow your breathing.
8. Repeat this breathing for several minutes. If you are lying down, you can put a small book on your stomach and try to breathe so it rises as you inhale and falls when you exhale.



## Muscle Relaxation

Muscle relaxation techniques are easy to do. Combining muscle relaxation with deep breathing can be even more effective in relieving stress. Some people find muscle relaxation useful for helping them to fall asleep.



### Instructions:

1. Lie down in a comfortable position, with your arms slightly out to the side and your legs straight.
2. Start with deep breathing for a minute or so.
3. Concentrating on each body part, one at a time, you will tense its muscles as tightly as you can, hold them for 10 seconds, then release and completely relax.
4. Start with your head and face—you'll move down through your body to your feet and toes:
  - ★ Raise your eyebrows as high as you can and hold for 10 seconds and then release.
  - ★ Smile as wide and hard as you can, hold for 10 seconds and then release.
  - ★ Touch your chin to your chest, hold and then release.
  - ★ Raise your shoulders as high as you can, hold and then release.
  - ★ Force your arms straight making them unbendable, hold and then release.
  - ★ Make fists, hold and then release.
  - ★ Tighten your stomach, hold and then release.
  - ★ Tighten your buttocks, hold and then release.
  - ★ Force your legs straight, hold and then release.
  - ★ Bend your ankles, pointing your toes at your knees, hold and then release.
  - ★ Curl your toes, hold and then release.
5. After relaxing each body part, notice how heavy each part feels when it is totally relaxed.
6. When completed, continue performing the deep breathing.

## Meditation

A goal of meditation is to quiet the mind. It reduces the feeling of stress and can rein in your emotions. For beginners, concentrating on something specific helps block or let go of thoughts. Here we provide you with some basic information and exercises to get you started.

|                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Imagery Meditation     | Quiet your mind by imagining yourself in a relaxing place.                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Mindfulness Meditation | Focus purposely on staying with a present experience whether that's the rhythm of your breathing, or a particular emotion, or something as simple as eating, as a means of creating a quiet mind where you feel calm and content. |

### Imagery Meditation Instructions:

Before you begin, choose the type of place that you most enjoy. Some examples are being at the beach, beside a stream in the woods or in a flower-filled meadow in the mountains. If you use that same place each time you practice imagery meditation, it can become a special calming influence for you to draw upon during a stressful situation. By simply imagining this place, you can reduce your feeling of stress.

1. If possible, find a place to lie down. If you can't do that, seat yourself comfortably so you can fully relax.
2. Begin with deep breathing. Practice deep breathing for approximately five minutes.
3. As you calm down and relax, begin to imagine yourself in your special place.
4. Use your imagination to block other thoughts and allow your mind to quiet—concentrate on the details of the place you are imagining, for example:
  - ★ If you imagine the sky, ask yourself “What does it look like? Are there clouds? What shade of blue is it? Is it sunrise, sunset, mid-day? Where is the sun?”
  - ★ What's near you? If there are flowers, what are their colors? Are they in bunches, on vines, are they like daisies or some other flower? Are there birds? Are they singing? Is there water? Can you hear it? Where are you in this place? Are you on sand, grass, leaves? Are you in a chaise lounge, on a blanket or on the bare ground?
5. Each time a thought about something else intrudes, just let it go and concentrate on your special place.
6. Be sure to continue using deep breathing as you do your imagining.
7. Try to stay with the thought of the imagined place for 10-20 minutes.



## Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness meditation is a way to calm down and stop running on “auto pilot” as many of us do in our busy lives. Several mindfulness meditation techniques relieve stress, including:

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Body scan          | Focus attention on various parts of your body, as in muscle relaxation except that instead of tensing/relaxing you just notice how each part feels without judging whether the sensation is good or bad. |
| Walking meditation | Focus on what each step feels like—your foot touching the ground, the rhythm of your breathing as you move, the wind on your face, the beating of your heart.                                            |
| Mindful eating     | Sit down at the table, focus completely upon the meal (no TV, newspaper reading or eating on the run) and eat slowly, completely enjoying and concentrating on each bite.                                |

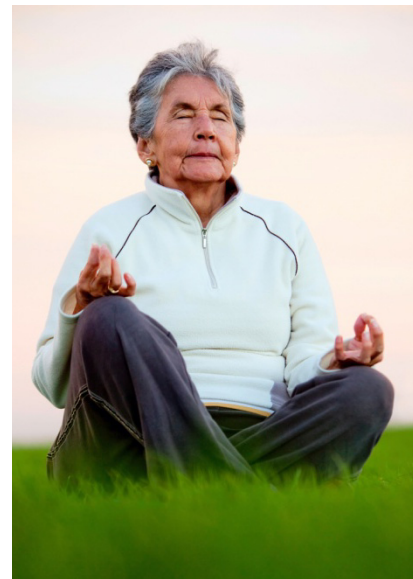
Observing your breath is another technique you can use to develop mindfulness. The breath is a wonderful reminder of this present moment, since it’s something we can directly tune into that purely occurs in the present. We can’t hold our breath forever, or prevent the taking in of air, as long as we’re alive. Focusing on your own breathing gives you something to pay attention to in the moment, without making a judgment.

***Mindfulness does not come until we decide to devote some time and effort to it.***

Mindfulness practices can be part of daily living, such as dressing, walking and brushing teeth. Setting aside a few minutes each day will build and stabilize mindfulness. Over time, the benefits gained from mindfulness meditation are: a clearer mind and less stressed body, a greater sense of pleasure in ordinary things and a fuller appreciation of life.

You might think that meditation sounds like daydreaming, but that's not the case. If you try it, you'll see that maintaining your concentration and bringing your mind back to the present when it starts to drift off takes effort. You'll get better at it over time. Done regularly, it actually changes the brain. The areas involved in joy and relaxation strengthen, while those involved in negativity and stress weaken.

As you try to focus the mind and pay attention, you'll be amazed to see how your mind jumps and wanders around—planning, dreaming and remembering. Over time, with repeated practice, the mind begins to settle down. Learning to recognize that the mind is wandering is considered a breakthrough in changing the old pattern of automatic pilot—if you can see that your mind is somewhere far away, you can bring your attention back to the present.



### Mindfulness Meditation Instructions:

Below is a practice exercise to do in a group, with one person reading the instructions to the others.

1. Sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor, your hands resting in your lap and your posture upright yet relaxed. If you're comfortable doing so, close your eyes softly. Otherwise, try to gaze at the ground ahead of you. Your head, heart and stomach should be stacked one above the other. Perhaps you are noticing the pull of gravity in your jaw or shoulders, or the feel of your feet on the floor.
2. Bring your attention to your breath; notice it as you breathe in and breathe out. Don't force the breath in any way, just notice it as it enters and leaves your body. Perhaps focus on the sensation in your nostrils as you breathe or the rise and fall in your stomach. You might even place your hands on your stomach for a few breaths just to feel the movement of the belly as you breathe in and then out. Continue to bring your attention to your breathing.
3. (Pause for a minute.)
4. You might begin to notice that your mind is having some difficulty just staying with the breath. Perhaps you are thinking about something, notice a feeling of boredom or restlessness or this or that. This is normal. Our minds naturally jump around like monkeys from tree limb to limb. The more we try to rein them in, the more they will jump. See if you can just notice where your mind has gone without judging yourself. Perhaps when you notice that you are no longer focused on the in- and out-breath, you can gently bring your attention back to it. Perhaps you can do this each time you are able to notice that your attention has wandered from your breath.
5. Let's sit here for a while longer, practicing keeping your focus on your breathing.
6. (Pause for another minute.)
7. Gently open your eyes when you are ready.

If you're interested in learning more about meditation or would like to have an audio guide there's a free download (to your computer, iPod or MP3 player) at <http://www.helpguide.org>. Type "*Ride the Wild Horse*" in the search box.



## Journaling

Journaling is writing down personal experiences, thoughts and feelings. It often provides an emotional release and leads to valuable insights, whether in the moment or after reflection and review. Sometimes journaling just chronicles daily activities and values. It may even evolve into a personal memoir.

### Why Journaling is Beneficial?

Journaling is a powerful form of writing down your personal thoughts and feelings without anybody ever needing to know. Perfect spelling, grammar or artistic skills aren't necessary. It can be handwritten on paper or typed on a computer. It can be like a scrapbook, too, with photos and notes from others.

Journaling offers a flexible, low-cost, creative way to help cope with the worries, concerns, questions, challenges and feelings of isolation that may come with being a Caregiver for a Veteran.



Just taking the time to journal can give you a break from the demands of caregiving. In turn, these positive benefits may be passed along to the Veteran. Self-discovery and solutions to challenging issues occur when maintaining a journal, reviewing entries and reflecting on them. Practical plans may even be put into place as a result of journal notes.

### Getting Started Using Prompts

It's quite easy to start a journal. One way is to start with a prompt to get feelings or thoughts flowing, something as simple as:

- ★ "I feel..."
- ★ "Today I want..."
- ★ "I love you, but..."
- ★ "If I am honest with myself, I am..."

If you commit to writing at least six lines after such a prompt, you'll have a solid journal entry, and may be inspired to write more. Why don't you give it a try?

“I feel...”

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“Today I want...”

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“I love you, but...”

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“If I am honest with myself, I am...”

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You can also use page headings as prompts. Prompts can explore feelings, hopes, wishes, desires and beliefs, all within the safety of the journal.

“Thoughts about caregiving”

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“How I want to care for myself”

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“What I’d like to do next for the Veteran”

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*Some prompts are good to repeat and revisit—the responses typically change over time.*



## Getting Started Using Themes

Some people find it helps to have a theme, such as:

A **gratitude** journal where you record all the things for which you feel grateful each day, week, etc. and note the people, animals, events and things that really matter to you.

An **ideas** journal where you record all the ideas and inspirations that flash into your mind at any time, without warning. The ideas can be about anything at all and the journal provides a place that you can come back to as an idea-storming resource when you have the time.

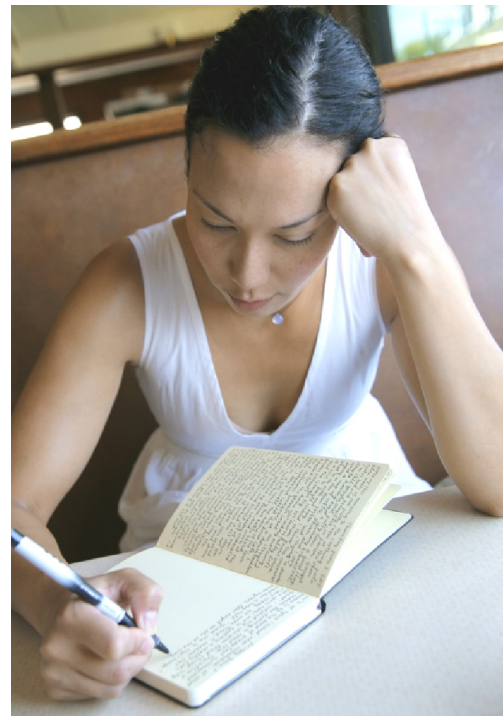
A **transition** journal where you record the transition you're going through. It can note changing patterns in your life and be a place to explore such questions as:

- ★ "What do I enjoy and not enjoy?"
- ★ "What do I expect for the future in what I am doing now?"
- ★ "Which people can help me as I transition?"

A **daily activities journal** where you simply record what has happened during the day. A note of a doctor's appointment or a visit to the VA can be a good way to track the value and scope of a busy caregiving schedule. And these entries may trigger further thoughts:

- ★ How should such future activities be handled?
- ★ What can we do differently?
- ★ How far have we come?

These markers provide a spot to take stock of the emotions stirred by these activities, too.



### Hints for a Rewarding Journaling Experience

**Find a quiet place** — a comfortable spot away from distractions.

Where can you go? \_\_\_\_\_

**Find the right time.** Some Caregivers pick the same time every day. Others like to keep their journal handy so that they can write things down when the right time presents itself. You may want to try different ways to see what works for you.

When is “your” right time? \_\_\_\_\_

**Relax.** Don't worry about the appearance of what you write. Remember this is just for you.

What relaxation technique will you use? \_\_\_\_\_

**Reflect.** Use your journal to work through the hard stuff in your life. Take time to reread what you've written in the past—you might be surprised at how far you've come.

How often will you re-read previous journal entries? \_\_\_\_\_



## Who Will Provide Care in an Emergency? Creating a Plan

It's not possible to prevent every illness, even if you are paying close attention to your health. A Caregiver's illness impacts both the Caregiver and the Veteran. Having an emergency plan in case you get sick provides peace of mind and assures the Veteran's ongoing care.

Supportive relationships are especially important in a time of emergency. The quality and close connection of social supports is more important than having lots of individuals involved. Staying in routine touch with supportive friends and family via quick notes or calls fosters a healthy connection.



Contact and  
Caregiving  
Information

Designated  
Decision  
Maker

Important  
Papers

### Contact and Caregiving Information

It's a good idea to keep all contact information—names, phone numbers, email and/or street addresses—for family and friends up-to-date and easily available. Having this information on display at home makes it possible for someone else to make calls if you can't. A special list can identify people who have agreed to step in for caregiving support, if you, the Caregiver, fall ill.

It makes sense to keep crucial caregiving information up-to-date and accessible.

- ★ In-home calendars
- ★ Medical contacts and appointments
- ★ Medication lists
- ★ Every-day activities information
- ★ Nutritional requirements including allergies
- ★ Other important information about the Veteran

Anyone stepping in as a Caregiver will want to know these details. The Veteran's Primary Care Team also needs to have up-to-date contact information.

## Designated Decision-Making

Both you and the Veteran, if able, can empower a designated person to make health care decisions in the event of incapacity. A legal document, often known as a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care, can be executed. See Module 6 for more information on these topics.

You can use a form to help you identify all your important information for ready reference by you or someone acting in your stead.

*Keep crucial information up-to-date  
and accessible.*





© Family Caregiver Alliance

**Where to Find My Important Papers – Page 1**

| Name: _____                                                                          |   |   |   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Social Security No: _____                                                            |   |   |   |
| Spouse/Partner's Name: _____                                                         |   |   |   |
| Social Security No: _____                                                            |   |   |   |
| Address: _____                                                                       |   |   |   |
| Date Prepared: _____                                                                 |   |   |   |
| Copies Given to: _____                                                               |   |   |   |
| My valuable papers are stored in these locations. (Enter address and where to look.) |   |   |   |
| A. Residence: _____                                                                  |   |   |   |
| B. Safety Deposit Box: _____                                                         |   |   |   |
| C. Other: _____                                                                      |   |   |   |
| Item                                                                                 | A | B | C |
| My will (original)                                                                   |   |   |   |
| Power of attorney–<br>healthcare                                                     |   |   |   |
| Power of attorney--finance                                                           |   |   |   |
| Spouse's/Partner's Will<br>(original)                                                |   |   |   |
| Safe combination                                                                     |   |   |   |
| Trust agreement                                                                      |   |   |   |
| Life insurance policy                                                                |   |   |   |
| Health insurance policy                                                              |   |   |   |
| Homeowners policy                                                                    |   |   |   |
| Car insurance policy                                                                 |   |   |   |
| Employment contracts                                                                 |   |   |   |



Where to Find My Important Papers – Page 2

| Item                              | A | B | C |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Partnership agreements            |   |   |   |
| List of checking, saving accounts |   |   |   |
| List of credit cards              |   |   |   |
| Retirement papers                 |   |   |   |
| Deferred compensation; IRA        |   |   |   |
| Funeral arrangements              |   |   |   |
| Titles and deeds                  |   |   |   |
| Notes (mortgages)                 |   |   |   |
| List of stored & loaned items     |   |   |   |
| Auto ownership records            |   |   |   |
| Birth certificate                 |   |   |   |
| Military/Veterans papers          |   |   |   |
| Marriage certificate              |   |   |   |
| Children's birth certificates     |   |   |   |
| Divorce/separation records        |   |   |   |
| Other                             |   |   |   |
| Other                             |   |   |   |

**Important Names, Phone Numbers, and Addresses**

Emergency Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Clergy: \_\_\_\_\_

Attorney: \_\_\_\_\_

Accountant: \_\_\_\_\_

Insurance Agent: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Your Family and Your Job

In this section we provide some ideas and information to help you and your family support one another. We also offer some suggestions about tapping into resources in your workplace, if you also have a job. It's difficult for most people to talk about a serious injury, so we provide some tips about how to do this.



## Ways Families Cope

Each family has its own way to support all of its members, one that works for them. To tap into this resilience, experts in family therapy offer these recommendations. Take a moment to reflect on how your family copes.

| Ways families cope                                                                                                                                                   | Don't do now | Do now | Could improve |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------|---------------|
| Acknowledge the range of emotions that each person has and the struggle with taking on new roles.                                                                    |              |        |               |
| Understand that each individual has unique needs and these needs may change over time.                                                                               |              |        |               |
| Recognize that routines likely will alter to accommodate changes in the Veteran and each family member may need to take on new roles and get used to a new schedule. |              |        |               |
| Realize that your family may struggle with feeling isolated since other families in your community are not going through the same things.                            |              |        |               |
| Learn to ask for help from one another.                                                                                                                              |              |        |               |
| Know that you might not get what you ask for and there might not be follow through, even when you asked and help was offered.                                        |              |        |               |
| Reach out for support.                                                                                                                                               |              |        |               |
| Learn to accept that "It's not fair!"                                                                                                                                |              |        |               |

## Working Together as a Family

To build and maintain family strength, you may find it useful to take some of these additional steps:

Have **regular family meetings** where each member of the family can talk about what's working and what's not, express feelings and give/get support. You can discuss distribution of chores, schedules and expectations.

Schedule **family fun days**—outings, movies with popcorn, “no chore” day, arts and crafts projects and the like so the family has positive experiences and memories to rely on when weary from day-to-day caregiving. Create a photo album or video from these days.

What fun activity could you put on the calendar for you and your family to enjoy?

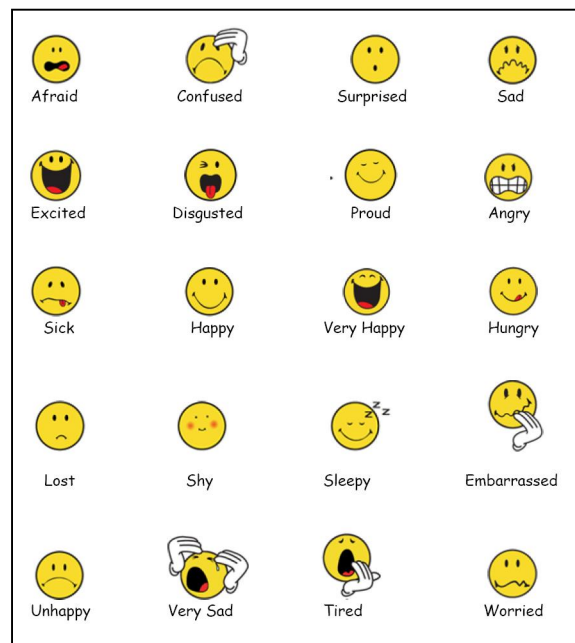
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Have a **“mood” chart** so family members can show how they're feeling today. You can find various types of emotions charts, with facial expressions, by using the words “Emotions chart” in an internet search. This Website offers an educational unit for young children, which includes a facial expressions chart:

[https://eee.uci.edu/wiki/index.php/Face:\\_How\\_Are\\_You\\_Feeling\\_Today%3F](https://eee.uci.edu/wiki/index.php/Face:_How_Are_You_Feeling_Today%3F)



Start a **family blog** to talk about what's going on and enlist the support of extended family—those who are miles away and those who are nearby and can pop in with a meal or provide child care regularly or occasionally.

Join an **online support group** with other families going through the same thing.

Experts who've worked with war-injured families have created a website,

<http://www.couragetotalk.org/>, to help families communicate as a family, especially with your children. Professional resources and support are also available to help keep your family strong.



### Enlist Long-Distance Family Members

Long-distance family members can be the sounding board for the primary Caregiver. You can talk to them when you're having a bad day and feeling down. You may want to ask your relatives to initiate calling as well as be available when you call. You might need to prompt them to ask, "How are **YOU** doing?" in addition to getting an update on the Veteran and the kids.

Other suggestions include:

- ★ Ask if they can plan time to visit and give you a break—it lets you have some time with your children without the pressure and interruptions of caregiving tasks.
- ★ Delegate some tasks that don't require being at your house—such as helping with bill paying, organizing photos, creating systems to help things run smoother or doing a family e-newsletter.
- ★ If they have financial resources, suggest they treat you to a dinner out once a month or pay to hire an attendant to give you a break.
- ★ Ask them to be a special friend to the children so they know there's a safe person to talk to about their feelings, when they don't want to say things to their parents.

### Getting support outside the home

Your family and Caregiver support system starts within the home, with family participation in an ongoing effort to help one another through each change and challenge. Support outside of the home is also necessary as the need for various support services may be life-long and may change over time. Changing family support needs may be triggered by factors, such as:

- ★ The Caregiver's individuality, interests and personal needs may become submerged by the Veteran's needs.
- ★ Family members feel trapped and need opportunities for respite.
- ★ Family members may feel isolated because they've stopped socializing because:
  - It may be embarrassing to the Caregiver when out in public.
  - The Veteran may get lost or frightened in unfamiliar places.
  - The Veteran's behavior upsets strangers.
  - Peers just don't understand.

## Helping Children Cope

As you are learning to adjust in the Caregiver role, the children are also in a state of transition. In this section we will discuss:

- ★ Why it is important to consider the needs of the children, the effects the injury has on the injured Veteran's children and parenting after the Veteran's return home.
- ★ We'll also discuss tips for communicating with the children about the changes in the Veteran and at home and ways to help children cope with their feelings.



## Parenting and the Veteran's Return Home

It is especially traumatic when children welcome home a parent with injuries. It is important to be aware of the changes to the lives of the children and how it may affect them. They need help and support to cope with the transitions or trauma they are facing in response to the injury.

- ★ Encouraging the Veteran to stay involved in parenting helps boost morale and benefits the whole family.
- ★ Setting up new routines with the participation of all family members is helpful to keep the family functioning with as little stress as possible.
- ★ Consistent rules and consequences help your child feel more secure with so much change whirling around. Don't be surprised if your child misbehaves to test whether the rules are real. A steady response, with usual "consequences" or discipline will provide a sense of security, order and control to the child.



How parents deal with the change affects how the child will also deal with it. Be aware of your own reactions to the changes—if you are upset, the children will be upset.

The parent (and Caregiver) has many stressors, and often may not recognize that the children are not getting enough attention. Children may become lost in the hectic and confusing adjustment period.

## Challenges Children Face

When communicating with your child, it is important to be aware of the many challenges they face. Often, there is a shift in attention from them to the Veteran at home, and they don't fully understand. Outside of the home, they recognize that their peers are not going through the same changes and they may have no one with whom they can identify.

Furthermore, children may misunderstand the nature of the changes in the Veteran. For example, it may be difficult for them to understand that a change in the Veteran's personality or interests is related to the physical injury. Or they may misunderstand the nature of the injury itself.

Changing schedules and a lack of familiar routines can also leave children feeling disoriented and lost.

Every child has different needs and different ways of coping. We will provide you with some tips on how you may begin tailoring the way you communicate with children and help them to cope and express themselves.



## Children's Emotions

Over time, the Veteran's condition and the child's level of understanding will change so ongoing attention to communication is important. You can help your child understand that it's normal to feel the full range of emotions—sad, angry, fearful, dismissive and happy.

Children often experience conflicting emotions. Although happy to have their parent back home, children can resent losing the attention they were used to having and seeing so much go to the Veteran. At the same time they experience guilt at feeling resentment and ambivalence.

They may also be upset that the life they know has been disrupted and may experience depressions, anxiety or fearfulness.

They also may feel embarrassed if their parent looks or acts differently from others. Depending on their understanding of the circumstances, they may feel a desire to take revenge on someone for hurting "my Mommy, or my Daddy." They may even feel they don't have a right to be happy if Mommy or Daddy doesn't seem happy.

What emotions have you observed in your children during the transition?

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### Communicating with Children

It's natural to want to shield children from unpleasant information, but doing that often backfires. Even babies pick up on emotional changes in the family. Children sense something bad has happened and become worried or frightened if they don't know what it is. Kids often imagine that it's worse than it is. Here are some suggested approaches:



- ★ Talk to your child about the situation as soon as possible, when you feel calm enough and won't be interrupted.
- ★ Whatever your child's age, sit together and talk at eye level—if you are calm your child will be better able to take in what you say. Use language your child can understand—don't provide *details* to a child who isn't ready to hear them yet. Take cues from your child—the questions asked, the topics brought up—to know the right time and how much to share.
- ★ Use props for young children—five-year-olds, for example, may find it helpful if you use a doll or puppet to show where the Veteran is injured.
- ★ Tell your child what's being done for the injured parent—it's important for a child to know that the Veteran is getting the best of care.
- ★ Reassure your children that you are safe and they will be cared for and kept safe.
- ★ Provide your children with opportunities to have fun.
- ★ Let your child's school know what is happening at home so they may also help you to recognize when the child needs support.

### Using Art Activities to Communicate with Children

You can use art activities to help your child of any age to express his/her emotions. Younger children are especially receptive to joining you in some quality “art” time. Children make very personal connections to their artwork. They instinctively create and share their art as tangible extensions of themselves. Take advantage of this instinct to help them to work through their emotions during this time of adjustment.

Some helpful drawing activities you can do together with your children are included in this workbook for you.



Ask your child to draw a picture of your family.

## My Family



Ask your child to draw a picture of your family doing something together that they enjoy.

**I wish that my family could...**



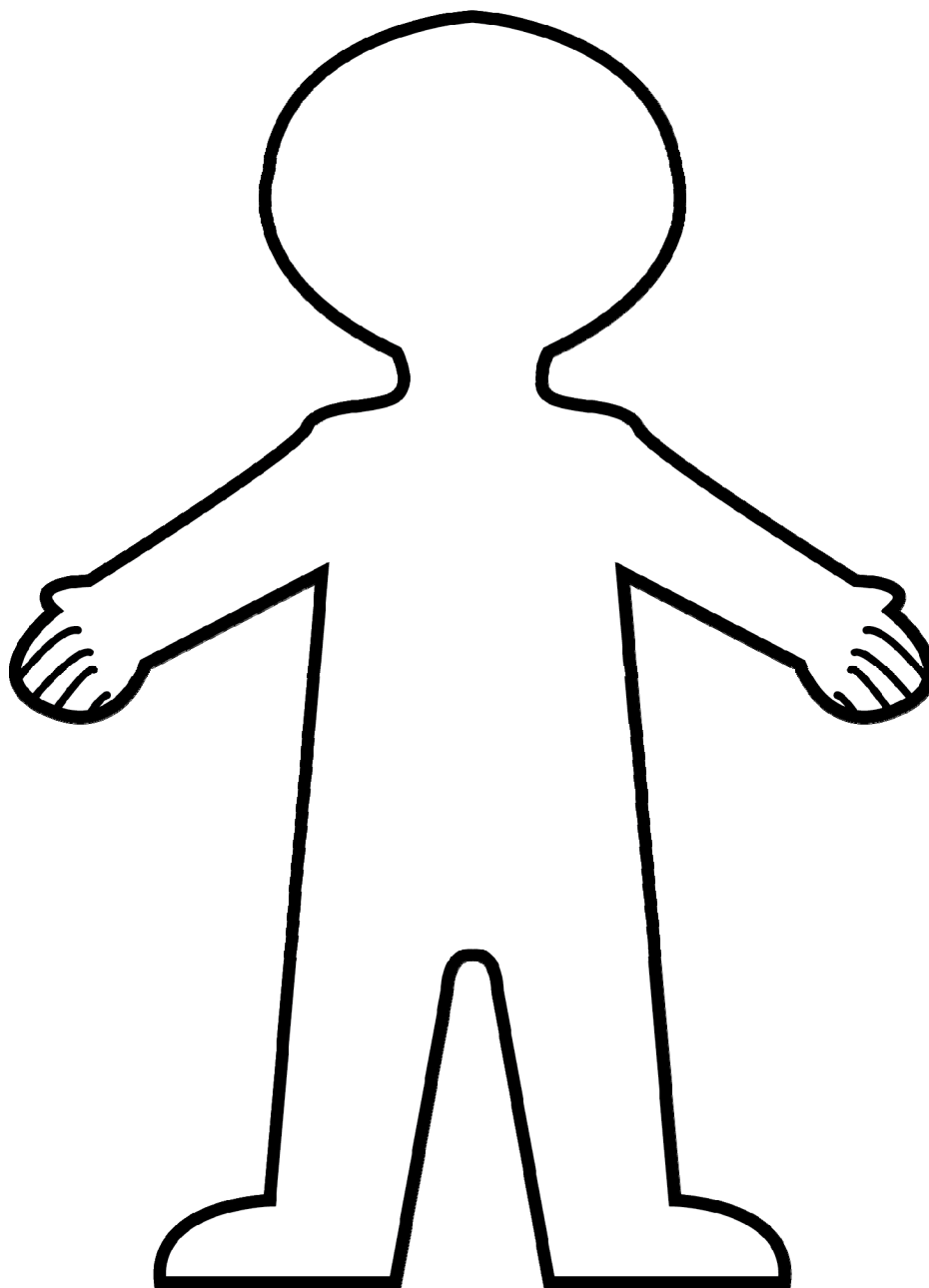
Ask your child to draw a picture of their feelings.

**When mommy or daddy says \_\_\_\_\_, I feel...**



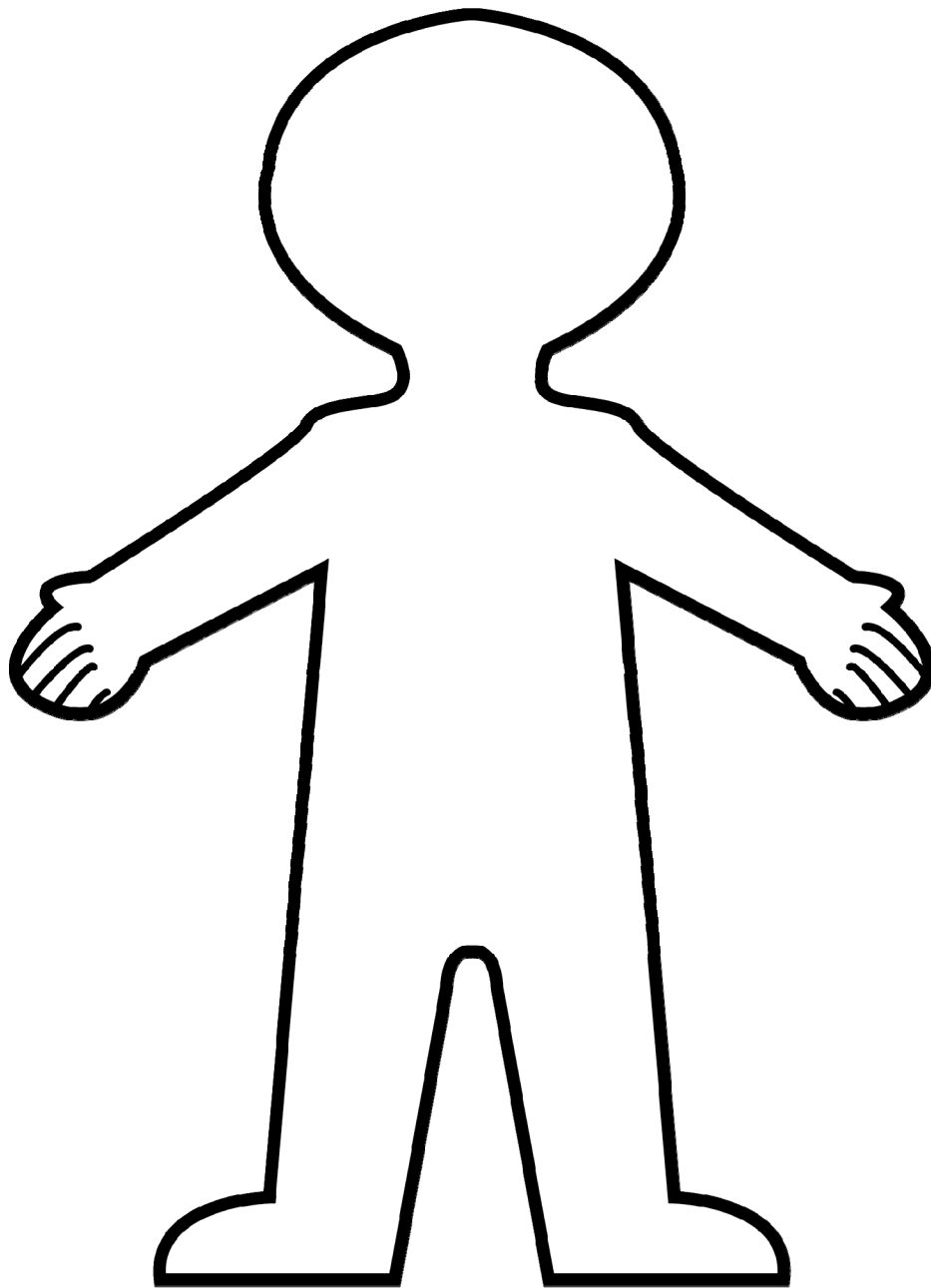
Ask your child to draw a picture of mommy or daddy and show where “it hurts”.

**Where does mommy or daddy hurt?**



Ask your child to draw a picture of where he or she hurts when mommy or daddy is hurt?

**Where do you hurt when mommy or daddy hurts?**



## Helping Your Children Respond to Others

If your children are **school-age**, friends, family and neighbors may continue to ask how the Veteran—their parent—is doing. Families often find it helpful to have a response ready—something brief, clear and easily repeated when needed. For example,

“My mom was injured in Iraq. She was in the hospital for six months and now she’s in rehab. We just moved into this neighborhood and I’m getting used to a new school and making new friends. I’m playing soccer.”

Parents can help children tell the caring adults in their lives—teachers, coaches, neighbors—what they need to know about the family injury.

## Communicating with Pre-teens

**Pre-teens** can be challenging throughout the recovery process. Between the ages of 9 and 12, children are most concerned with peers and fitting in. They compare their family to others. Some pre-teens are willing and able to help; others need more prompting. Here is some sample language for this age group:



“Daddy had a traumatic brain injury when the bomb exploded. It caused changes to the way his brain works. He needs a lot of rehab to learn how to do things again. He has trouble with his feelings sometimes. It isn’t about you. It’s hard to be patient and understanding. I know you get angry and frustrated, too. We need to keep talking about it.”

“Mommy is getting rehab so she can do all the things she used to be able to do. I’m sure you get frustrated sometimes when she needs help with something quite simple. It would be great if she didn’t have this problem, but we all need to work together to get things done around here. I appreciate your help and when you get done helping, maybe you’d like to have a friend over.”

## Communicating with Teens

Normal development for **teens** is to become increasingly independent, but now they're pulled back into the family. Although intellectually capable of understanding the details of the injury and family situation, they're not ready to be a "substitute" adult. They can become irritable and "act out"—take risks such as drinking, drugs or driving recklessly. Staying in communication is really important. Here are two examples of what to say to a teen:

"You know that Dad's leg had to be amputated because the bones were crushed and the medics couldn't save it. He gets cranky and moody when he has pain in his "phantom leg" and when he isn't making progress as fast as he would like. I know sometimes you're the recipient of his frustration and that he takes it out on you because of your pink hair. Try to understand that he loves you and is doing the best he can to cope. And he doesn't love you any less—it's just hard."

"Mom's PTSD gets in her way on her bad days. I'm sure it's no fun to come home to a moody parent who hasn't gotten out of bed all day and that you're embarrassed that the house isn't being kept up. But, she's getting help through the VA and on good days things are pretty much back to normal. It's hard to be patient, but we all need to hang in there together to get this to work for all of us. I worry about you and wonder if you are getting depressed also. Would you like to talk with a counselor about the stress you're under because of all of this?"

*Finding My Way: A Teen's Guide to Living with a  
Parent Who Has Experienced Trauma"  
is a helpful book for teenagers.*

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### Watching for Signs of Depression

The moods of pre-teens and teens typically are like the wind. They can be pleasantly breezy and calm, and then suddenly whip into a howling rage. Aside from the teen moodiness, serious depression is a real possibility. Parents can help children through depression by looking for these symptoms and providing them with professional help:

- ★ Change in sleeping patterns.
- ★ Change in eating habits.
- ★ Acting out behavior, especially in the form of aggression.
- ★ Withdrawal/isolation – reluctance to go out with friends.
- ★ Lack of joy in doing things.
- ★ Moodiness.
- ★ Too much TV/computer use.
- ★ Decline in school performance.



## Making Your Job Work for Your Family

Although you're a Caregiver 24/7 you also may be employed several hours a day, or several days a week to make ends meet or to extend health care benefits. A job also may be a source of satisfaction and friendships, providing a welcome break from caregiving tasks.

Caregiver-employees have learned that it works best for their families when an employer can offer:

**Flex time**—being able to adjust your start and ending times, make up time and working flexible hours may mean the difference between working and not working.

**Telecommuting, or working from home**—enables you to meet the demands of the job while being present to oversee care.

**Part-time work**—allows you to meet the demands of caregiving yet maintain concentration on work days.

**Support** from co-workers and supervisors.

**Family leave days or leave-time assistance**—co-workers may want to donate their paid time off to you to relieve your stress from time to time.



### *Federal and state laws protect Family Caregivers from workplace discrimination.*

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The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) requires companies with 50 or more employees to allow up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a seriously ill parent, spouse or child, while protecting job security.

Some states have Paid Family Leave programs. In California, partially paid time off is allowed for caregiving responsibilities.

## Resources & References

### Your Physical Health

- ★ An example of a recipe site is <http://www.epicurious.com>
- ★ Two examples of sites with nutritional guidance are the Mayo Clinic's <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/MY00431> and the USDA's My Food Pyramid <http://www.mypyramid.gov/> which has interactive tools to get a personalized eating plan, or to plan and assess food and physical activity choices based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans)
- ★ Family Caregiver Alliance "A Guide to Taking Care of Yourself" Available at: <http://www.Caregiver.org>. Click Caregiver Info & Advice, click Hot Topics and scroll to "A Guide to Taking Care of Yourself."
- ★ Family Caregiver Alliance. (2003). "Taking Care of You: Self-care for Family Caregivers. Available at: <http://www.Caregiver.org>. Click Caregiver Info & Advice, click Hot Topics, scroll to Fact Sheets and scroll to "Taking Care of You: Self-care for Family Caregivers."

### Your Emotional Health

- ★ National Family Caregivers Association "Reaching Out for Help" Available at: <http://www.thefamilyCaregiver.org/pdfs/ReachOut.pdf>
- ★ National Family Caregivers Association "Believe in Yourself" Available at: <http://www.thefamilyCaregiver.org/pdfs/BelieveInYrself.pdf>

### Meditation

- ★ Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center. Traumatic brain injury a guide for Caregiver of Servicemembers and Veterans: Module 3. Available in electronic format at <http://www.traumaticbraininjuryatoz.org>
- ★ Helpguide.org "Wild the Ride Horse" meditation guide, Free download available at: [http://www.helpguide.org/toolkit/emotional\\_health\\_audio.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/toolkit/emotional_health_audio.htm)
- ★ UCLA free mindfulness meditation downloads at: <http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22>



### Journaling:

- ★ “How to Keep a Journal” Available at: <http://www.wikihow.com/Keep-a-Journal>
- ★ “How Veterans Can Aid Resilience Through Journaling” Available at: <http://www.realwarriors.net/Veterans/treatment/journaling.php>

### Your Family and Your Job

- ★ Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, “Resources for Recovery: Communicating with Children about Parental Injury” Available at: <http://www.couragetotalk.org/talking.children.php>
- 1. “Coaching into Care”-- a telephone service that provides assistance to family members and friends trying to encourage a Veteran to seek health care for possible readjustment and mental health issues. Available at: <http://www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching> or send email to [CoachingIntoCare@va.gov](mailto:CoachingIntoCare@va.gov)
- ★ Sesame Workshop “Deployment, Homecoming, Changes, Grief.” Available at: <http://www.sesameworkshop.org/initiatives/emotion/tlc>

### Organizational Resources

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

VA Caregiver Support: Caring for those Who Care

<http://www.caregiver.va.gov/>

