Manage Stress

workbook

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration

This workbook was designed by the National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (NCP). It will guide you through steps to identify and track your stress, and practice a variety of strategies that have been shown to counteract stress.

It goes without saying that you have probably experienced periods of high stress and danger. You probably are well acquainted with the 'fight or flight' feeling that often occurs in such situations. This heightened feeling occurs when our bodies release stress hormones in response to the stress. The hormones keep us alert and ready to deal with whatever is happening or is about to happen.

While this natural response serves us well in the short term, our bodies need time to recover. Prolonged, high stress can cause high blood pressure, a weakened immune system, heart disease, and digestive problems. Headaches, depression, aggressive behavior, and low energy are other common symptoms.

You can learn specific techniques for managing your stress more effectively. These techniques can help you lower your stress and improve your readiness to respond in stressful situations. You'll also deal more easily with stress when it comes up.

It's important to remember that you cannot always control the causes of your stress, but you can control the way you react to the stress.

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Stress Management Goal

This workbook chapter is designed for you to use on your own. However, if you feel stuck, or would like help with this, feel free to contact your primary care/PACT team. There are staff on the team, including the Health Behavior Coordinator, who are experienced in helping with this kind of goal-setting.

Be sure that the goal you set is **SMART** (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ction-oriented, **R**ealistic, **T**ime-based). You may find the *My Health Choices worksheet in Appendix A* helpful.

Suggested goal: On a scale of 0–10, where 0 means not bothersome, 5 means somewhat bothersome, and 10 means very bothersome, my goal is to have my average stress level be below _____ for _____ days a week.

My stress management goal is:

_____

_____

_____

Keys to Managing Your Stress

1 Track Your Stress

Stress affects everybody differently. By regularly monitoring and tracking your stress, you raise your awareness of the way you experience stress and get a better sense of your natural stress level. Knowing how your body reacts to stress will help alert you when your stress level is rising.

Activity:
Track your stress levels using the ***Stress Tracker on page 4.***

2 Identify the Sources of Your Stress

Knowing the sources of your stress is critical. After you have a good idea of the things that cause your stress, you can develop a plan for dealing with each of them.

Activity:
Make a list of the things that cause your stress. Use the ***Identifying Your Stressors Worksheet on page 5*** for ideas.

3 Practice Mindfulness Regularly

Mindfulness is a way to be fully aware in the present moment of physical sensations, emotions, and thoughts, but without judging them. Regular daily practice of stress management techniques will allow you to deal with your stress in a healthier way.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) techniques have been proven to reduce stress and stress-related conditions in Veterans. They can reduce anxiety, improve attention and memory, and help manage chronic pain. These techniques center on being fully aware in the present moment without judgment.

Activity:
Review the ***Stress Symptoms Checklist on page 6.*** Explore the ***MBSR Techniques on page 7*** to determine which are most effective for managing the stress symptoms you identified.

4 Be Physically Active

Physical activity is one of the most effective stress management techniques. Physical activity increases endorphins, improves sleep, raises self-esteem, and releases muscle tension.

While moderate physical activity is good for stress management, overly vigorous activity can actually contribute to stress levels. If you are going to exercise to help relieve stress, do so at an intensity level that is comfortable for you.

Find more information:
in the *Be Physically Active* Healthy Living message at **http://www.prevention.va.gov**. Regular physical activity can improve mood, reduce stress, and decrease health risks.

5 Practice Deep Breathing

It's one of the fastest ways to deal with stress in the moment. Use deep breathing to gain control over stress, anxiety, and panic. It is also effective for managing depression and emotional responses, and can even be helpful for some medical conditions.

The more you practice, the better you will become at managing stressful situations.

Activity:
The next time you rate your stress level to be a 7 or higher, practice deep breathing to immediately lower your stress level.

6 Plan Pleasant Activities

Research has shown that the things we do affect the way we feel. When you spend time in activities that you find relaxing, enjoyable, or just plain fun, you tend to feel less distressed and happier.

For many people, life demands seem to replace pleasant activities. If you notice this happening to you, it's time to plan for positive time.

Activity:
Actions affect emotions. Plan a pleasant activity using the ***Pleasant Activities Tip Sheet in Appendix B*** for ideas.

Deep Breathing Exercise

Deep breathing is one of the fastest ways that you can regain control over stress.

1. Start by sitting down in a comfortable place that's free from distraction. Uncross your legs, put both feet on the floor, and rest your hands in your lap. Pay attention to how this position feels and let your mind and body just "be" for a few moments.
2. Close your eyes and notice the pattern of your breath as you inhale and exhale. It may be soft or loud, slow or quick, or shallow or deep. Make a mental note of your breath before you start relaxing with deep breathing. Just breathe naturally for a few moments, taking slow and deep breaths in through your nose and then breathing out through your mouth.
3. Now hold your breath for 5 seconds after you inhale, and for another 5 seconds after you exhale. Continue breathing in this rhythm for a few moments.
4. Breathe naturally for a moment. Now place both of your hands on top of your stomach and try to notice how your belly rises with each inhale and falls with each exhale. Notice your breath moving in and out again from your belly, to your chest, and gently out through your mouth. Continue breathing naturally.
5. This time say, "Relax" silently or aloud after each time you exhale.
6. Repeat this exercise for 1 to 5 minutes.

Tools for Managing Stress

STRESS TRACKER

Rate your stress level regularly by choosing a number between 0-10, where 1 means not bothersome, 5 means somewhat bothersome, and 10 means very bothersome. Tracking your stress will help you identify patterns in your stress.

Stress RULER

"On a scale of 0 – 10, how bothersome has your stress been?"

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at All Bothersome		A Little Bothersome			Somewhat Bothersome		Very Bothersome			Extremely Bothersome

When you notice your stress rising, you should practice your favorite stress management techniques before your stress levels get too high.

Date & Time	Stress Level (0–10)	What was I doing?	What was I thinking?

IDENTIFYING YOUR STRESSORS worksheet

Use this tool to list your stressors. For each item on the list, mark whether or not it is important to you and whether or not you have control over it.

You might also try to avoid these stressors or limit exposure to them. If you can't avoid dealing with them, practicing deep breathing when you interact with them might limit your stress response.

- ❑ Changing Jobs/Promotion
- ❑ Conflict With Family
- ❑ Keeping Healthy
- ❑ Lack of Confidence
- ❑ Loneliness
- ❑ Money Worries
- ❑ Pain/Fatigue
- ❑ Planning for Retirement
- ❑ Public Speaking
- ❑ Traffic to/from Work
- ❑ Travel/Vacation/Holidays
- ❑ Upcoming Wedding
- ❑ Global Warming
- ❑ World Economy
- ❑ War/Terrorism

Other: _____ _____ _____

Now, review your list of stressors and, for each one, ask:

- Is this important to me?
- Is this under my control?

List each of your stressors in the appropriate box below:

	Important	Not Important
Control		
Do Not Control		

- Let go of the stressors that you identified as not important. They aren't worth the stress they cause.
- Take some time to address those stressors that you feel are important and that you do have at least some control over.
- Practice stress management techniques for the stressors that are important but that you do not control. You might also avoid these stressors or limit exposure to them.

STRESS SYMPTOMS checklist

When you know how your body responds to stressors, you can focus your attention on finding the best stress management technique for each one. Check off the symptoms you experience when you're feeling a lot of stress.

- ❑ Backache
- ❑ Change in Sex Drive
- ❑ Chest Pain
- ❑ Chest Tightness
- ❑ Digestive Issues
- ❑ General Muscle Tension
- ❑ Headache
- ❑ Heart Palpitations
- ❑ Fatigue
- ❑ Lack of Energy
- ❑ Muscle Cramps/Spasms
- ❑ Neck & Shoulder Pain
- ❑ Pain
- ❑ Sleep Problems
- ❑ Smoking
- ❑ Teeth Grinding
- ❑ Upset Stomach/Nausea
- ❑ Blaming
- ❑ Depression/Anxiety
- ❑ Forgetfulness
- ❑ Lack of Motivation
- ❑ Loneliness
- ❑ Sadness or Depression
- ❑ Crying
- ❑ Eating When Not Hungry
- ❑ Frustration
- ❑ Irritability/Anger
- ❑ Restlessness
- ❑ Worrying

Other: _____ _____ _____

NOTE: Some of these symptoms can indicate a medical problem rather than stress. If you are experiencing any unusual symptoms or symptoms that are severe enough to prevent you from engaging in your daily activities, contact your healthcare team right away.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Techniques

- **Mindfulness Meditation**
  The intention of Mindfulness Meditation is to be fully aware of what is going on in the present moment without any judgment.

- **Compassion Meditation**
  This meditation can lower stress and stress hormone levels and raise self-esteem. You can improve self-compassion by working on unhelpful thoughts and by practicing this meditation.

- **Body Scan Meditation**
  This meditation is deeply relaxing and can help you become more accepting of areas of pain or discomfort.

- **Mindful Eating Exercise**
  This exercise helps you to practice mindfulness with something you do every day: eating. You will learn how to increase your awareness while eating, which can increase mindfulness and improve your eating habits overall.

- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation**
  This exercise can help you become aware of muscle tension, so you can release it when needed.

- **Mindfulness Circle**
  This image will help you return to mindful awareness throughout your day.

If you find these techniques helpful, you can speak with your primary care/PACT team to find stress management programs that might be available in your area.

Mindfulness Meditation

To anchor yourself in the present, focus on your breath as you inhale and exhale. Breathing mindfully does not involve a conscious changing of your breath.

1. Set aside a 1 to 5 minute period of time, and tell yourself that you will not engage your thoughts during that time. As thoughts pop up, just notice them and let them go.

2. As you notice your mind thinking about things, try to let those thoughts go without judging them and return your attention to the experience of breathing. The point is not to stop having thoughts. The point of this meditation is to become more aware of your thoughts without automatically engaging them.

If focusing on your breath does not work to bring you into the present moment, you can focus on anything in the present, such as sounds, a picture you like, or a candle flame, so long as you don't have to think about it.

Compassion Meditation

1. First, take a few deep, cleansing breaths and ground yourself in the present.
2. As you breathe deeply, focus on your heart and visualize softness, warmth, and compassion glowing in your chest. Repeat these phrases to yourself: *"May I be happy. May I be well. May I be safe. May I be peaceful and at ease."*
3. After a minute or two, visualize extending this energy to include somebody you care deeply about. Now repeat the phrases, filling in the person's name. For example, *"May my wife be happy. May my wife be well. May my wife…."*
4. Next, visualize extending the energy to somebody you feel neutrally about. Repeat the phrases with his or her name. For example, *"May the cashier at the store be happy. May the cashier be well. May the cashier…."*
5. Now extend the energy to somebody for whom you have negative feelings. Repeat the phrases with his or her name.
6. Finally, visualize extending this energy to the rest of the world.

As you become comfortable with this practice, try extending the length of time you spend at each stage, increasing the overall time spent on the meditation.

Body Scan Meditation

The Body Scan Meditation can help you become more accepting of areas of pain or discomfort and not tense in response to them, which can make the discomfort worse.

To practice the Body Scan Meditation, get into a comfortable position. You might lie down on the floor or in bed with a pillow under your head. Take a few deep, grounding breaths and gently bring your awareness to the present.

1. Pay attention to a specific body part, such as your left foot. As you breathe deeply, scan that part of your body for sensations. Notice the sensations you feel, but try not to get lost in thought. Gradually let your focus move to different body parts — each leg, your hips, stomach, chest, hands, arms, and head.
2. Practice mindfulness meditation with your focus on your body. Become aware of your mind's tendency to get lost in thought. When you notice this happening, just let the thought go and gently redirect your attention back to your body. Try not to engage in the content of the thoughts.

If you have any pain or discomfort, just notice it, accept it, and continue scanning. Continue to scan each part of your body in this way until you have scanned your whole body.

Dealing With Distractions During Meditation

The purpose of meditation is not to concentrate on your breath or to achieve a perfectly still and serene mind. The goal of meditation is to achieve uninterrupted mindfulness.

Being distracted is normal; it's how our minds work. When you sit down to concentrate on your breath, don't be upset when your mind wanders from the subject of meditation. Instead, simply observe the distraction mindfully.

Whenever you are distracted away from your breath as you meditate, briefly switch your attention to the distraction. Make the distraction a temporary object of meditation, but only temporary. Your breath should remain your primary focus.

Switch your attention to the distraction only long enough to notice certain things about it. What is it? How strong is it? How long does it last? Return your attention to your breath as soon as you have wordlessly answered these questions.

The first step to changing something is seeing it the way it really is — these questions can free you from what is distracting you and give you insight

Mindful Eating Exercise

Mindful eating is an ongoing practice, but it starts with three simple steps.

1. Become aware of the physical characteristics of food. Make each bite a mindful bite. Think of your mouth as being a magnifying glass, able to zoom in. Imagine magnifying each bite 100%. Pay close attention to your senses. Use your tongue to feel the texture of your food and to gauge the temperature. Take a whiff of the aroma. Ask yourself, *"How does it really taste? What does it feel like in my mouth? Is this something I really want? Does it satisfy my taste buds? Is my mind truly present when I take a bite so that I experience it fully?"*
2. Become aware of repetitive habits and the process of eating. Notice how you eat. Fast? Slow? Do you put your fork down between bites? Are you stuck in any mindless habits, such as eating a snack at the same time each day, multi-tasking while you eat, or eating the same foods over and over again?

   Ask yourself the following questions: *"Do I have any ingrained habits concerning how I snack? When I pick up my fork, what stands in the way of eating wisely?"*
3. Become aware of mindless eating triggers. Look for specific cues that prompt you to start and stop eating. Is your kitchen a hot spot for snacking? Do feelings such as stress, discomfort, or boredom lead to a food binge? Do judgmental thoughts like "I'm an idiot!" trigger mindless eating?

Become an expert on the emotional buttons that trigger you to eat when you aren't physically hungry. When you know your triggers, you can anticipate and respond to them.

Ask yourself, *"What am I feeling right before I mindlessly snack? Is my environment, emotional state, or dining companion helping or hurting my efforts to eat wisely?"*

See the *Eat Wisely* Healthy Living message at **http://www.prevention.va.gov** for more information on nutrition.

into its nature. It's important to tune into the distraction without getting stuck on it.

When you begin using this technique, you will probably have to do it with words. Ask your questions in words and answer in words. Soon you will be able to dispense with the use of words altogether. As the mental habits are established, you will be able to simply note the distraction, note the qualities of the distraction, and then return your focus to your breath.

A distraction can be anything: a sound, a sensation, an emotion, a fantasy. Whatever it is, don't try to repress it or force it out of your mind. Just observe it mindfully and wordlessly. When you do, it will fade by itself.

Don't fight your distracting thoughts, even if they have popped up before. Any energy you give toward resistance makes the distraction that much stronger. Just observe your distractions mindfully, and return your focus to your breathing. Refuse to feed your distractions with your own fear, anger, and greed, and they will eventually go away.

Be patient and persistent. While mindfulness disarms distractions, it may take many times to break the hold of deep-seated thought patterns.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation exercises will help you recognize when your muscles are tense and teach you how to return your muscles to a relaxed state.

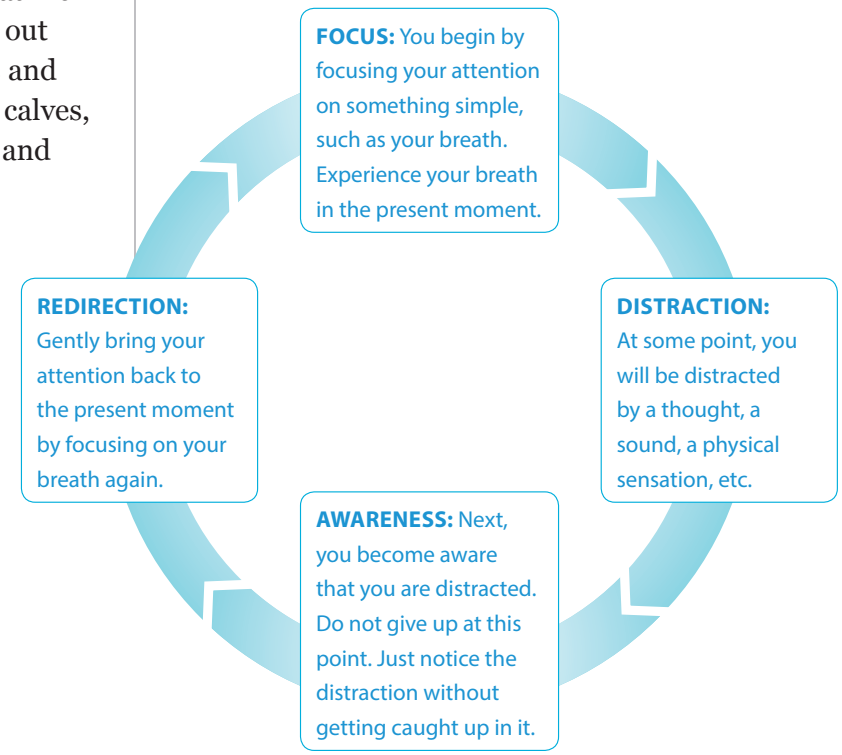
1. Breathe normally and let your body just 'be'. Take note of how your body feels from your toes to your head. Does any of your body feel tense, stiff, or achy?
2. Close your eyes and notice how your toes feel. Tightly curl your toes to the point where you feel tension, as if trying to squeeze a small ball between your toes and the ball of your feet. Hold this toe curl for 10 seconds. Release your curl and let your toes spread. Notice how your toes feel when they are free from tension.
3. Next, repeat this cycle of tensing and relaxing with your calves. Next, do your thighs. Move up the body. Repeat with your hands, then arms, and then the muscles of your upper back and shoulders. Finally, tense and relax your neck and face.
4. After you complete tensing and relaxing each muscle in the body, breathe in through your nose and hold your breath for 5 seconds. Slowly and gently breathe out through your mouth. Open your eyes and notice how your muscles—your feet, calves, thighs, fists, arms, upper back, neck, and face—feel when relaxed.

Mindfulness Circle

Mindfulness practice doesn't have to be limited to focusing on your breath. You can do almost anything mindfully. Try practicing mindfulness with one of the activities below or one of your own. Be aware of your breath, senses, thoughts, and feelings as you perform the activity. Consider your posture, your mood, how quickly you move, what is going on around you, and your level of tension.

Try being mindful while doing these everyday actions:

- Washing hands.
- Stopping at a red light.
- Looking at a clock or your watch.
- Washing dishes.
- Brushing your teeth.
- Taking a shower.
- Dressing and undressing.
- Walking.



Mindfulness and Feelings

*You can achieve greater emotional intelligence and stability by using the **RAIN** (**R**ecognize, **A**ccept, **I**nvestigate, **N**on-Identify) approach to your feelings.*

Recognize

- Acknowledge what is happening in the body and in the mind.
- What is going on here?
- In a compassionate, mindful way, notice what is going on when you feel this feeling.
- Experience and recognize the pure essence of the feeling.

Accept

- What is, is. Feel what you feel.
- The stream of feelings is always with us.
- This stream of feelings is ever changing and has pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral tones.
- Accept what you feel.
- Remember, what we resist, persists.

Investigate

- Look into the feeling closely. Study the feeling.
- Notice how it feels in the body.
- Does it have a sensation of movement, of temperature, of density, or of color?
- What is the energy of the feeling like?
- What stories go along with this feeling?
- Is there a particular time of day when this feeling surfaces?
- Does anything immediately precede the arrival of this feeling?
- How long does the feeling last? How do you feel after the feeling has passed?

Non-Identify

- Feelings are like weather patterns. They arise and pass. They are not you. They are not your identity. They do not define you.
- Recognize the universal nature of the feeling: *"Right now I am feeling this, and there are many other people just like me feeling this. Many who have come before me have felt this feeling and many who will come after me will feel this feeling. This is a human feeling." "Breathing in, I am aware I feel _____ . Breathing out, I meet myself with compassion."*

As you get to know your feelings, you will develop a natural wisdom and insight into which feelings you need to let be, which require action, and which will cause more suffering if you act on them.

Sometimes you gain insight into the root of the feeling which will enable you to take a different approach to the moment or situation. Other times you may observe the feeling, but do not want to continue fueling the feeling with thought and energy.

MINDFULNESS HOMEWORK

Experiment with mindfulness. Try to bring yourself fully into the present to experience each situation. Do no more than one of these experiments each week. For example, for one week, see if you can bring mindful attention to pleasant events. In a different week, try bringing mindful attention to negative events, and so forth.

Pleasant Event Report

- Be aware of one pleasant event or occurrence while it is happening at least once this week, paying attention to the sensations in the body, thoughts, and feelings.
- What was the experience?
- How did your body feel? In detail, describe the sensations you felt.
- What thoughts accompanied this event at the time?
- What emotions accompanied this event at the time?

Unpleasant Event Report

- Be aware of one unpleasant event or occurrence while it happens at least once this week. Pay attention to the physical sensations, thoughts, and feelings that arise at the time of the experience.
- What was the experience?
- How did your body feel? In detail, describe the sensations you felt.
- What thoughts accompanied this event at the time?
- What emotions accompanied this event at the time?

Pleasant Communication Report

- Record one pleasant communication event. Describe the communication.
- With whom? What subject?
- Were you aware of pleasant feelings during the communication?
- What did you really want from the person or situation? What did you actually get?
- What did the other person(s) want? What did they actually get?
- What thoughts accompanied this event at the time?
- What emotions accompanied this event at the time?

Unpleasant Communication Report

- Record one unpleasant communication event. Describe the communication.
- With whom? What subject?
- How did the difficulty arise?
- Were you aware of the unpleasant feelings during the communication?
- What did you really want from the person or situation? What did you actually get?
- What did the other person(s) want? What did they actually get?
- What thoughts accompanied this event at the time?
- What emotions accompanied this event at the time?

Other Factors for Managing Stress

Aligning Your Core Values

Losing track of your core values can contribute to unhealthy stress levels. Think about what really matters to you in your life. Spending time doing what is important to you can reduce stress and give you energy. Filling out a Personal Health Inventory can help you explore all areas of your life. Talk to your health care team or go to the Health for Life* website for more information.

Problem Solving

Mindfulness practice helps you to slow down and become more aware of options. Mindfulness fosters flexibility, which can be essential for problem solving. Mindfulness also can help you assess how you feel about the various options and make an educated decision about the next best step.

When you face a difficult problem, begin by grounding yourself with mindful breathing. Next, visualize the problem without getting attached to finding solutions; just breathe and be aware of the issue. Allow solutions to come and go—jot down any that seem useful—and then come back to the meditation. As solutions emerge, take a moment to see how each one feels, noticing if one seems more right than another.

Developing Resilience

Resilience refers to a person's ability to withstand and bounce back from difficult situations. Mindfulness helps you reduce stress, which in turn increases your resilience. Mindfulness enables you to be better able to step back and assess situations from a calm place and ultimately to adapt to the present moment.

Positive coping involves doing things that keep your body and mind healthy and strong. Coping in healthy ways builds your resilience. Mindfulness is one form of healthy coping that builds your resilience. Getting enough rest and sleep, planning your days, staying physically active, eating healthy foods, and having supportive people in your life also build your resilience. Building your resilience helps you cope with stress in a healthier way. Positive coping, or dealing with stress well, leads to making better decisions, figuring out safe ways to solve problems, and lowering your chances of developing health problems like high blood pressure and depression. Positive coping even helps you deal better with physical and emotional pain, manage your weight, sleep better, and be calmer when in stressful situations, such as driving or being in crowded places.

Eating Wisely When Stressed

When we feel stressed, we tend to make poor food choices such as skipping meals and choosing less healthy, convenient options like fast food and processed foods. Such choices are partly due to high levels of stress hormones, which cause us to crave fat and sugar.

Unfortunately, eating lots of junk food and sugar and skipping meals actually creates physical stress for our bodies that adds to our overall stress load. When we choose healthier foods that are high in nutrients, our ability to handle stress improves because we've removed one source of physical stress from our lives. Ask your primary care team about a healthy eating plan and mindful eating, which have been shown to help reduce overeating and improve weight loss results.

See the *Eat Wisely* Healthy Living message at **http://www.prevention.va.gov** for more information on nutrition.

Changing Unhelpful Thoughts

Habitual, negative thoughts can contribute to stress as well as perpetuate negative behaviors. Mindfulness can help you be more aware of your unhelpful thought patterns so you can replace them with thoughts that support your goals. Mindfulness helps you to get into the present to make the necessary changes.

Getting Social Support

Having social support is an important component for stress management. It is important to have the support of other Veterans and people who know what it has been like.

Increasing Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is the ability to be forgiving of yourself. Low self-compassion can increase stress levels and stress hormone levels while lowering self-esteem. You can improve self-compassion by working on unhelpful thoughts and by practicing compassion meditation.

Activity:
Practice the ***Compassion Meditation on page 8.***

Managing Interpersonal Stress

You can lower stress by practicing mindful communication. This includes saying what you really mean as well as mindful listening. It will increase your awareness of unhelpful communication patterns and improve communication with difficult people.

Working With Chronic Pain

Being mindful can help you manage chronic pain, whether it is physical or emotional. Many people physically tighten up in response to pain or otherwise resist it. Resisting your feelings of pain creates another layer of distress and makes the suffering worse. You can lessen your suffering, possibly even get rid of it altogether, by eliminating your resistance to pain. Because pain is both real and inevitable, it's important to accept it.

Activity:
If you are experiencing pain or discomfort, use the ***Body Scan Meditation on page 8*** to become more aware of any resistance you may be having to your pain that can actually make your discomfort worse.

If you are experiencing unusually severe pain, you should talk to your healthcare team about it.

You should contact your healthcare team or the VA Crisis Hotline at 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1) if your stress seems to be getting out of control or you are having thoughts of harming yourself or others.

You can always reach out to your primary care/ Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) for help.

Notes

My Health Choices

Healthy Living

Circle your choice below.

Be Involved in Your Health Care

Be Tobacco Free

Eat Wisely

Be Physically Active

Strive for a Healthy Weight

Limit Alcohol

Get Recommended Screening Tests & Immunizations

Manage Stress

Be Safe

Your Choice

_____

_____

My goal for the next week is: (Set a SMART goal—Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, Timetable to complete. 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 that 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 Confident				Somewhat Confident					Very Confident

Follow-up Date: _____ **Follow-up Method:** ❑ Phone ❑ In-person ❑ Other

Complete and update your plan every week. Use the charts below to track your progress.

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		

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		

Pleasant Activities Tip Sheet

Research[1-2] has shown that ratings of mood improve if you add some pleasant activities to your routine. Here is a strategy to use pleasant activities to manage stress and add some fun to your life.

- Plan for at least one pleasant activity per day, even if just a few minutes long.
- The activity should not be *for* someone else … it should be designed to give *you* joy.
- If you can't do something you used to enjoy, think about a good replacement. For example, you may not be able to go deep sea fishing, but you might enjoy visiting the boat show or just walking on a pier.
- Aim for gentle pleasures, like taking a walk in a favorite place, walking the dog, or taking time to read the comic strips.
- Mix it up! Variety is the spice of life.
- Simplify — look for simple pleasures that don't require a lot of preparation or money.
- If you have trouble coming up with activities, think about what you enjoyed in the past.

Here are some examples of pleasant activities that some have chosen, but remember to focus on what ***you*** enjoy:

- ❑ Stop at a park on the way home from work to go for a walk by the lake
- ❑ Go for a bike ride
- ❑ Cut some flowers to put in a vase in your home
- ❑ If you like boating, doing something like waxing your boat, visiting a marina, or fixing a part may be enjoyable
- ❑ Go fishing
- ❑ Park your car for a few minutes at a place with a nice view
- ❑ Sit outside and watch for birds or wildlife
- ❑ Check the rankings of your favorite sports team
- ❑ Take a warm bath
- ❑ Call an old friend

1. Lewinsohn, P.M., Munoz, R.F., Youngren, M.A., & Zeiss, A.M. (1986). *Control your depression* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

2. Antonuccio, D.O. (1998). The coping with depression course: A behavioral treatment for depression. *The Clinical Psychologist,* 51(3), 3–5.

Healthy Living Matters. Prevention Works.

VA

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Veterans Health Administration

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