Whole Health: It Starts With Me

Whole Health is an approach to health care that empowers and enables YOU to take charge of your health and well-being and live your life to the fullest. It starts with YOU. It is fueled by the power of knowing yourself and what will really work for you in your life. Once you have some ideas about this, your team can help you with the skills, support, and follow up you need to reach your goals.

All resources provided in these handouts are reviewed by VHA clinicians and Veterans. No endorsement of any specific products is intended. Best wishes!

https://www.va.gov/wholehealth/

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What is Whole Health?
Whole Health recognizes you as a whole person. Whole Health goes beyond your illnesses, injuries, or disabilities. It focuses on health and well-being and includes self-care and complementary therapies (such as acupuncture, massage, and yoga), along with your medical care. In Whole Health care, you are a more active partner with your health care team.

Why is the VA changing the way health care is provided?
The core mission of Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is to "Honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being." "Exceptional care" is different than it used to be.[1] It now includes the following:
- getting to know you better
- learning what matters most to you
- focusing on your goals for your life and health
- helping you with self-care

How is Whole Health different?
Health care usually focuses on preventive care, lowering risk, and illness and disease. Are your cancer screenings and flu shot up to date? Do you feel sick or are you injured? Do you smoke or is your weight healthy? What medications are you on and how are your test results? These things are still important. And Whole Health is more than that. It focuses on what is important to you in your life and how you want to live your life. It includes self-care and things you can do to increase healing and improve your health and well-being. You and your health care team work together to help you do what you want to do. Together, you discuss what you are doing well and what type of support from others may help you be healthy.

What is meant by self-care? I don't have a medical background.
Research shows that the most important ingredient in being healthy is how you take care of yourself,[2] and you don't need a medical background to do that. Medical care is important, but how you live your life between medical appointments makes the most difference. Self-care is not something you have to figure out on your own. In Whole Health care, you look at all areas of your life. You may want to start with just one or two areas. The areas of self-care include the following:
1. **Moving Your Body**—exercise and movement for energy, flexibility, and strength
2. **Surroundings**—how things around you affect your body and emotions
3. **Personal Development**—learning and growing throughout your lifetime
4. **Food and Drink**— nourishing your body
5. **Recharge**—sleep, rest, relaxation
6. **Family, Friends, and Co-Workers**—your relationships with others
7. **Spirit and Soul**— a sense of connection, purpose, and meaning
8. **Power of the Mind**— tapping into your ability to heal and cope

More information will be available on our website for each of these topics.

Will I continue to see my primary care provider?
Yes. If you receive your health care from the VA, you will continue to see your provider and health care team of nurses, social workers, dietitians, chaplains, pharmacists, and mental health professionals. You may notice them asking about what matters to you in your life so they can help you with your life goals. You may also receive more self-care support and be referred to complementary services like health coaching, yoga, acupuncture, and massage therapy if available in your VA medical center or community.

How will Whole Health help me?
Military missions are each unique. Not all maneuvers are handled in the same way. Likewise, there is no one way to help all people to be their healthiest and best. Each person is unique. In a Whole Health approach, health care teams get to know each individual person better and make sure that care is geared to each person's needs and goals. This personalized care is an important part of Whole Health.

Is there a downside to Whole Health care compared to the type of care I have received in the past?
There is not a downside to Whole Health compared to the way you received care in the past. Some questions may be new for you. You can choose what you share and how detailed your answers will be. It is likely that you will be very happy with Whole Health care, because your health care team will focus on you as an individual. People are more likely to follow a plan that they helped create and that is based on their own life.

What can I do if I feel unsure about the Whole Health approach?
If you are uncertain or uncomfortable at any time with a Whole Health approach, talk with someone on your health care team. Ask questions, share your concerns, get more information. Let your health care team know what would be helpful to you.

How do I get started with Whole Health?
- Step #1: Help your health care team get to know you better. Tell them what really matters to you in your life: what makes you happy, and what you want your health for.

- Step #2: Talk to your health care team about your self-care. In what areas are you doing well? What are your natural strengths? What areas are challenges for you? Are there one or two areas on which you would like to focus?

- Step #3: Work with your health care team on a plan for your health. You are the expert on yourself—what you can do or cannot do, how you feel, how you want to live your life, what you want to accomplish. Your health care team can help you think through ways to improve your health that work for you. They can offer suggestions to improve your self-care. They can recommend strategies that fit your interests and lifestyle and the resources available in your area. They can help you set goals and identify steps along the way to reach those goals. Making changes in even one area can improve your health. Your team will support you as you work toward your goals and help you find other experts to help, if needed. They will also

work with you to revise your plan over time as you accomplish goals or need to change them.

When can I start Whole Health?

You don't need to wait to get started. You can complete a [Personal Health Inventory](#) to explore what matters to you and what you want your health for. You can talk to a friend, family member, health coach, spiritual leader, or someone on your health care team about areas you want to work on. Your health care team is ready to start the Whole Health process with you now or at your next appointment. Share your interest in Whole Health with someone on your health care team today!

The information in this handout is general. **Please work with your health care team to use the information in the best way possible to promote your health and happiness.**

This handout was written for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) by Charlene Luchterhand MSSW, Education and Research Coordinator, Integrative Health Program, University of Wisconsin Department of Family Medicine and Community Health.   The handout was reviewed and edited by Veterans and VHA subject matter experts.

References

1. Press Ganey Associates. Competing on Patient-Driven Value: The New Health Care Marketplace. 2015; Press Ganey website. http://www.pressganey.com/resources/white-papers/2015-strategic-insights-report-competing-on-patient-driven-value. Accessed December 12, 2017.
2. Ford ES, Bergmann MM, Kroger J, Schienkiewitz A, Weikert C, Boeing H. Healthy living is the best revenge: findings from the European prospective investigation into cancer and nutrition-Potsdam study. *Arch Intern Med.* 2009;169(15):1355-1362.

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