

Complementary and Alternative Therapies for Gulf War Veterans

War Related Illness and Injury Study Center
Washington, DC



Presented by the **VA War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC)**

Why incorporate CAM?

- Numerous Veterans have complex and difficult-to-diagnose, difficult-to-treat health problems following deployment
 - Including Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

Examples

- Multisymptom illnesses that may include but are not limited to:
 - abnormal weight loss
 - cardiovascular symptoms
 - fatigue
 - gastrointestinal symptoms
 - headache
 - joint pain
 - respiratory system symptoms
 - sexual dysfunction
 - menstrual disorders
 - muscle pain
 - neurologic symptoms
 - neuropsychological symptoms
 - skin conditions
 - sleep disturbances

Examples

- Chronic fatigue syndrome
- Chronic widespread pain
- Fibromyalgia
- Irritable bowel Syndrome
- Infectious diseases
 - Brucellosis
 - Campylobacter jejuni
 - Coxiella burnetii (Q fever)
 - Malaria
 - Mycobacterium tuberculosis
 - Nontyphoid Salmonella
 - Shigella
 - Visceral leishmaniasis
 - West Nile virus

Complementary Therapies for Gulf War Veterans

- RAC and WRIISC shared goal:
 - Improving health and lives of Veterans with Gulf War Illnesses

CAM & Gulf War Veterans Research

- DoD-funded acupuncture clinical trial
 - “Effectiveness of Acupuncture in the Treatment of Gulf War Illness”
 - New England School of Acupuncture
- VA-funded MBSR clinical trial
 - “Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for Gulf War Syndrome”
 - VA Puget Sound HCS, Seattle WA VAMC

Treatment

- First response
 - Provide the highest quality traditional western medical care available
- Sometimes results are not completely satisfactory
 - Residual pain, disability, suffering
 - Side effects of treatments
- Veterans, their families, and their care providers seek additional beneficial therapies

Veteran Use of CAM

- Parallels use in non-military populations
- 38% of adults in America use CAM
 - 2007 National Health Interview Survey

VHAHCS Complementary and Alternative Medicine

- 84% of VAs offer either in-house CAM therapies or refer out
 - 2002 VA Health Agency Information Group Study
 - Study to be repeated this year
- VA Central Office preparing publication of guidelines for CAM

Washington, DC WRIISC Complementary Care & Integrative Health Care

- Services offered since 2007
 - Acupuncture
 - Yoga Nidra
 - Labyrinth

Acupuncture

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Acupuncture is Over Three Thousand Years Old

Acupuncture's greatest contribution to the field medicine is its understanding of *qi*—translated as life force, or energy.



Qi helps us maintain health. It provides the power for:

- Growth
- Development
- Movement
- Maintaining body temperature
- Protection against illness
- Overall regulation

Qi is Our Life Force

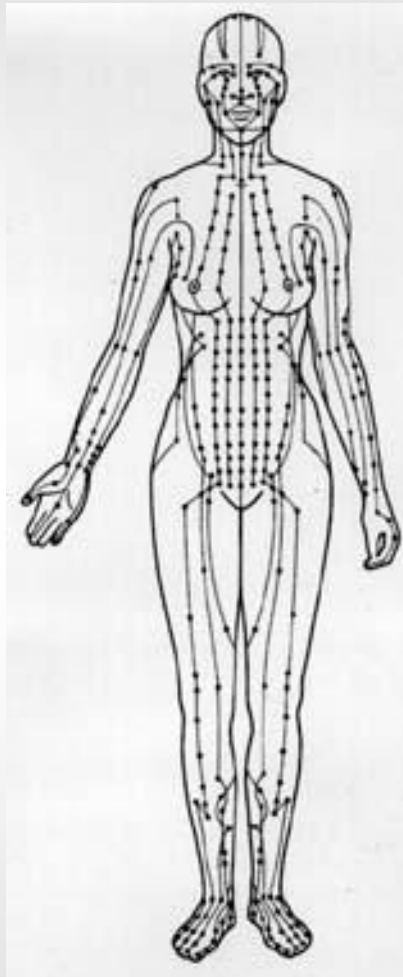
When our *Qi* is balanced, our capacity to both heal disease and prevent future illness is maximized.

Our health is influenced by the quality, quantity and balance of our *Qi*.



Symptoms of illness, whether mental, emotional or physical, are an indication of an imbalance of *Qi*.

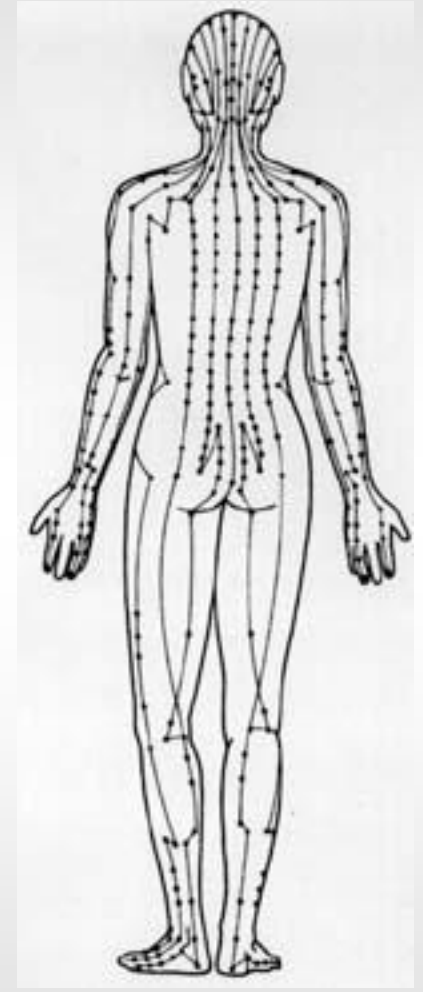
Acupuncture Helps Restore Connections



Acupuncture heals below cognition

It helps people feel more embodied, more present, more self aware

12 main pathways – connected end to end like garden hoses





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Washington, DC WRIISC Acupuncture Options

- Full body, individual series of treatments
 - Unique design for the individual's presentation



DC Acupuncture Options

- Group Ear Acupuncture
 - Five points on each ear
 - Balance of sympathetic/parasympathetic nervous systems as well as emotional balance
 - Can be used for detoxification
 - Often affects sleep patterns
 - Multiple venues at DC WRIISC





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Acupuncture and Integrative Health Care

- Acupuncture can help:
 - Improve focus and attention, supporting psychotherapy clients to integrate and embody insights
 - Bring energy to physical injuries, supporting the work of physical therapists
 - Mitigate side effects of necessary medications
 - Help some reduce medications – for sleep or pain for example



Acupuncture Helps Veterans Get All The Way Home - Safe and Sound

Acupuncture helps

the mind find a place to rest,

the body release trauma's imprint and

the spirit come back home – *safe and sound.*



Acupuncture Interest at WRIISC-DC

- Year 2010
 - 649 full body acupuncture treatments
 - 145 Gulf War Veteran treatments
 - 890 ear acupuncture treatments
 - 103 Gulf War Veteran treatments

Satisfaction Data 2007-2010

Acupuncture

- Improvement in symptoms (n = 103)
 - 45% yes, completely
 - 51% yes, somewhat
 - 3% no improvement
 - <1% too early to tell
- Overall quality (n = 112)
 - 70% excellent
 - 20% very good
 - 10% good
 - <1% poor
- Would recommend to other Veterans (n = 130)
 - 99% yes
 - <1% no

WRIISC-DC

Acupuncture Research

- The Effect of Acupuncture on PTSD-Related Insomnia
 - PI: Michelle Prisco, MSN, ANP-C, WRIISC-DC
 - Results anticipated May-June 2012

Yoga Nidra

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Yoga Nidra – Brief History

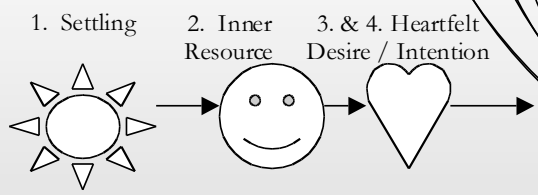
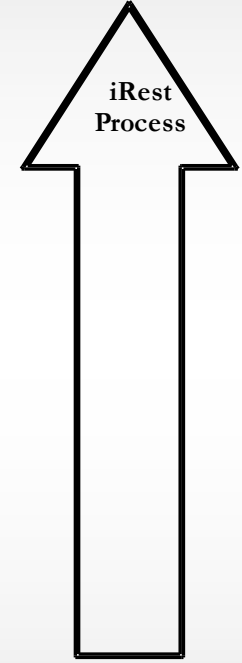
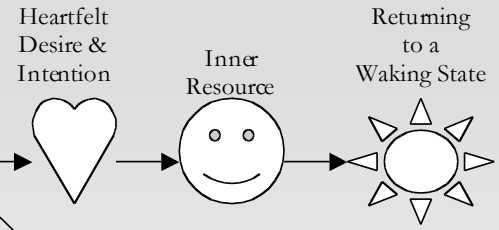
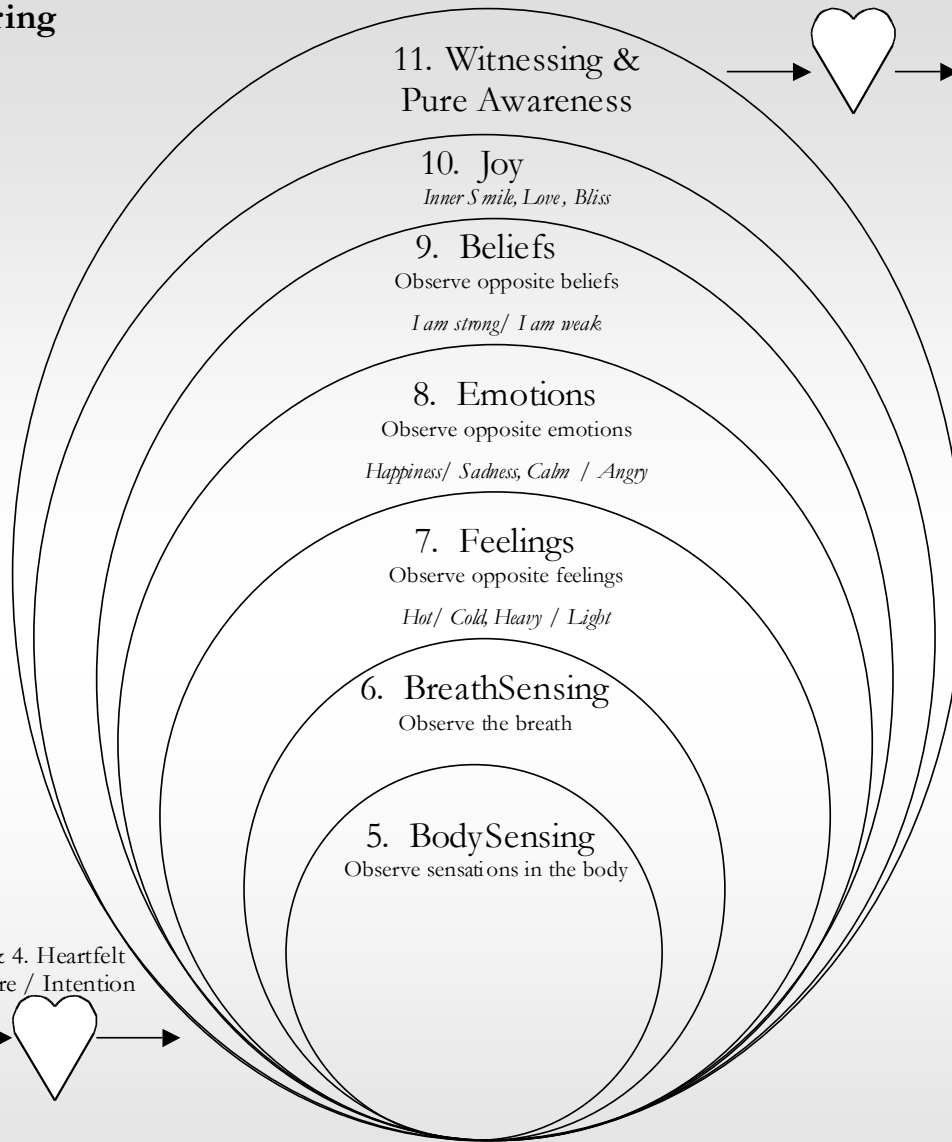
- 4,000 year old guided meditation practice
- Adapted by Dr. Richard Miller as Integrative Restoration (iRest®) for clinical applications



Yoga = a feeling of wholeness
Nidra = across all states

What happens during iRest?

During iRest, we observe and welcome in various aspects of our waking existence, starting with the most gross form, the physical body, and then moving up through more subtle layers, such as the breath, feelings, emotions, beliefs and joy. As we welcome in everything that is present in the body and mind, our thoughts begin to calm, and in the process, we connect to the part of ourselves that is always peaceful, a state of Pure Awareness.



Yoga Nidra – Why it Works

- Develops an intention, focusing effort toward a goal
- Engages the parasympathetic relaxation response
- Increases the capacity to tolerate intense emotional states
- Challenges beliefs that color emotional states and reactions
- Guides participants to accessing their underlying equanimity
- Incorporates the healing aspects of a variety of treatment modalities

Participants Report

Decreases in:

- ↓ *Insomnia*
- ↓ *Depression and anxiety*
- ↓ *Irritability and angry outbursts*
- ↓ *Chronic pain*
- ↓ *Use of medications*
- ↓ *Intrusive thoughts*
- ↓ *Substance abuse relapse*

Participants Report

Increases in:

- ↑ *Energy level*
- ↑ *Mental Focus and Clarity*
- ↑ *Comfort with situations they can't control*
- ↑ *Ability to regulate affect*
- ↑ *Greater sense of ease and well-being*
- ↑ *Restful sleep*

Yoga Nidra Interest at WRIISC-DC

- Year 2010
 - 1,318 Total Sessions
 - 240 Gulf War Veterans

Satisfaction Data 2007-2010

iRest® Yoga Nidra

- Improvement in symptoms (n = 165)
 - 10% yes, completely
 - 85% yes, somewhat
 - 4% no improvement
 - <1% don't have symptoms
- Overall quality (n = 184)
 - 66% excellent
 - 30% very good
 - 1% good
 - 2% poor
- Would recommend to other Veterans (n = 184)
 - 100% yes

Yoga Nidra – Research

■ Completed:

- Walter Reed Army Medical Center (Active duty service members: PTSD)
- Committee on the Shelterless (Homeless: anxiety, well-being)
- U of Missouri (College students: well-being)
- Brooklyn, NY (Chemical dependency/relapse prevention)
- Boise State University (Multiple sclerosis)
- Brooke Army Medical Center (Health care workers: compassion fatigue and insomnia)

■ In progress:

- Chronic pain patients (Washington, DC VA)
- PTSD (Miami VA)
- Substance Abuse Patients (New York City)
- Homeless People (Marin County, CA)

Yoga Nidra at VA/DoD

- Brooke Army Medical Center
- Camp LeJeune Marine Corps Base and Naval Hospital
- Chicago VAMC
- Evanston VAMC
- Miami VAMC
- Palo Alto VAMC
- Sacramento, CA Vet Center
- Walter Reed Army Medical Center
- Yuba/Sutter, CA Stand Down Office
- Washington, DC VAMC

Yoga Nidra for Veterans

Take Home Points

- Ancient meditation practice with significant applications in clinical settings
- Already widely used in military settings
- Research shows reduction in anxiety, stress-related symptoms, chronic pain, and increased sense of well-being, restful sleep
- Once learned, can be self-administered independent of the health care system

Labyrinth

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Labyrinth – Brief History



Labyrinth from the Atlantic Bronze Age, Galicia (Spain)

- > 4,000 year history
- Found in many cultures and religious traditions
- Now used in health care facilities, schools, and houses of worship worldwide



Labyrinth carving at a temple in Halebid, India, circa 2500 BC

Labyrinth - Practice

- Not like a maze: no dead ends
- Pace is up to you
- Opportunity to slow down, relax, relieve stress, reflect, meditate



9/11 Memorial Labyrinth at Boston College

Satisfaction Data

- Year 2010
 - Total participants: 481

Labyrinth

- How was your walk on the Freedom Labyrinth Path? (n = 227)
 - 50% excellent
 - 42% very good
 - 7% fair
 - <1% no value

- Would you walk the labyrinth again? (n = 227)
 - 99% yes
 - <1% no
- Descriptions of the labyrinth:
Calming, relaxing, serene, awesome, soothing, wonderful, excellent, mellow, balanced, peaceful, meditative, rejuvenating, surprising, inspirational, therapeutic, centering, uplifting, helpful, purposeful, anchoring, euphoric

Labyrinth - Research

- Walking meditation is shown to reduce anxiety and elicit a 'relaxation response' associated with:
 - lower blood pressure and breathing rates
 - reduced incidents of chronic pain and insomnia
- Also associated with many of the benefits seen in sitting meditation and yoga

Benson, H., "The relaxation response: therapeutic effect," *Science*. 1997 Dec 5;278(5344):1694-5. PMID: 9411784

Labyrinths at VA



- Veterans, staff, and volunteers can walk a labyrinth at:
 - Albany VAMC
 - Canandaigua VAMC
 - Seattle VAMC
 - Memphis VAMC
 - Washington, DC VAMC
- Finger Labyrinths can be used anywhere

Labyrinth for Veterans

Take Home Points

- Simple form of walking meditation with a long history
- Widely used in hospitals, health care facilities, schools, and houses of worship to offer space for reflection and meditation
- Research shows efficacy of walking meditation in reducing anxiety and stress-related symptoms

Factors to Consider

- Does this approach fit with treatment goals?
- Risks and benefits
 - Contraindications, modifications
- Research findings
 - Level B evidence base or higher
- Veteran's self-report
- Provider qualifications
- Coordination among care providers
- Expense and availability

Integrative Health in the VA System of Care

- VA Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation
- Post-Deployment Integrated Care Initiative (PDICI)
- Planetree 
PLANETREE
- Polytrauma Service, Recreational Therapy
- James A. Haley VA Chronic Pain Rehabilitation Program
- Training standards & occupational codes

Thank you

- Veterans
- Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses
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