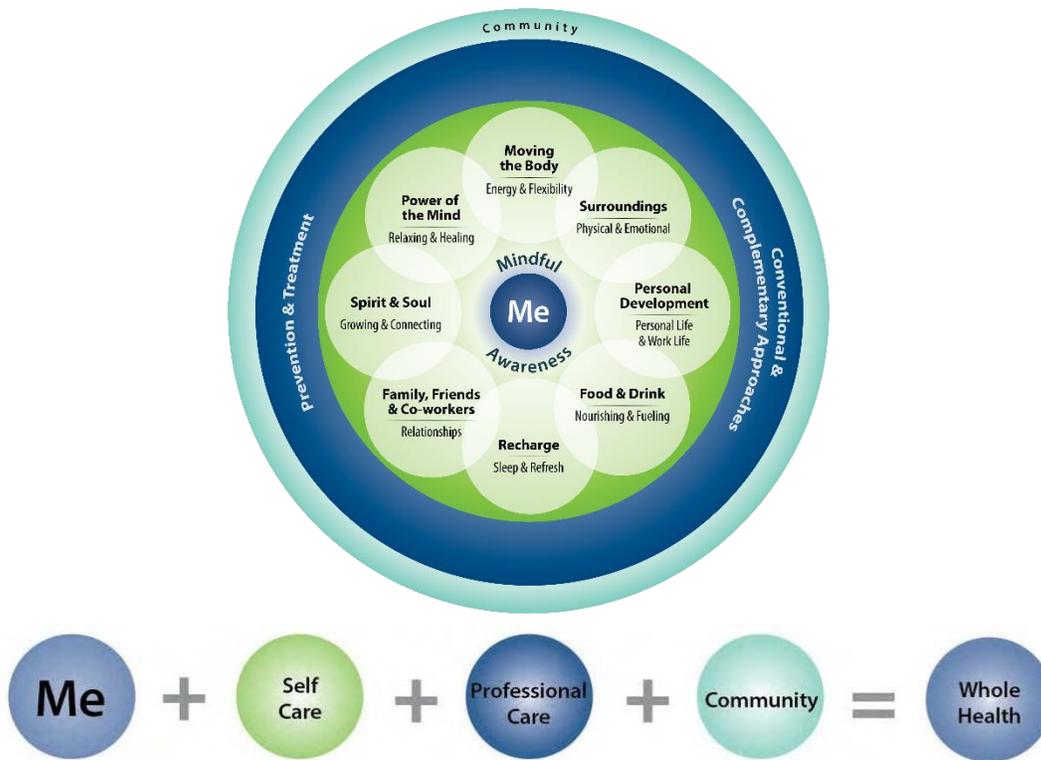


WHOLE HEALTH: INFORMATION FOR VETERANS

An Introduction to Recharge for Whole Health



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/>

An Introduction to Recharge for Whole Health

What does “Recharge” for Whole Health mean?

“Recharge” sounds like something you do with your cell phone or other electronic devices. “Recharge” for people is very similar. It refers to sleep, rest, and relaxation, which give you energy. Our bodies need to have enough of these each day, so that we can live well and enjoy life. This handout can help you focus more on this area of self-care, so that you can be at your best.

How can I use sleep, rest, and relaxation to improve my health?

Sleep, rest, and relaxation refresh your body and mind. Your body and mind need enough sleep to work properly. Rest and relaxation can lower stress and give you peace. A good balance between activity and rest improves your health and well-being.

How may I be healthier if I get good sleep?

Good sleep does the following:¹

- Gives your body time to fix itself and heal
- Gives your brain time to grow and learn
- Helps you feel better and perform better
- Affects hormone levels needed by your body and mind

You can learn more about these health benefits from the Whole Health handout “[Hints for Encouraging Healthy Sleep](#).”

The following are some findings about sleep from research studies:

- Almost 31,000 people were surveyed about their health and sleep.² Those who slept under five hours each night were compared with those who slept seven hours. Those with less sleep were more likely to develop health conditions. These included obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, higher blood fats, strokes, and heart attacks.
- A review of 27 studies looked at sleep in over 70,000 older people.³ People who regularly slept less than 7 hours each night or more than 7-8 hours had a greater chance of dying early from any cause.
- Trouble sleeping can lead to thoughts of suicide.⁴

How much sleep do I really need?

The National Sleep Foundation recommends 7-9 hours a night for adults age 18-64 and 7-8 hours a night for adults age 65 and over.⁵ Some people need more or less. If the number of hours you sleep is a lot different than recommended, you may have a health issue. It would be good to discuss this with your health care team. If you get much less sleep on purpose, you may be endangering your health and well-being, without knowing it. If so, consider developing a plan to help yourself get more sleep.

The amount of sleep needed varies from person to person. This is a good time to use mindfulness awareness. (See the Whole Health handout “[Introduction to Mindful Awareness](#)” if you are not familiar with this term.) Consider focusing on your sleep and

how you feel. Ask yourself some questions such as the following to learn if you are getting the amount of good sleep that your body needs:

- How much sleep do you usually get each night?
- How well do you think you sleep? Do you wake up a lot?
- How sleepy are you during the day? Do you feel rested? Does your body feel tired? Is your mind fuzzy?
- How much energy do you have? Do you get things done? Are tasks difficult to do?
- Do you often nod off during the day when you're doing other things?
- Do you take naps during the day?
- Do you need caffeine to get through the day?
- Do you feel irritable or moody? Could this be due to the amount or quality of sleep you get?

How can I help myself if I'm not getting good sleep?

First, try to figure out why you're not getting enough good sleep. Sleep problems are common for both active military members and Veterans.^{6,7} There are many reasons for not getting enough good sleep. Sometimes the reasons are obvious. Other times it's harder to figure out. Some reasons might be related to your military service. You may need the help of your health care team or a mental health professional to learn what is causing your sleep problems. Examples are listed below.

- Anxiety, depression, grief, or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Pain
- Health conditions such as sleep apnea or restless leg syndrome
- Dreams or nightmares
- Side effects of medications
- Substances such as caffeine, alcohol, or tobacco
- Caregiving responsibilities (such as child care or care for an adult with a disability)
- Working different shifts
- Taking on too much in your work or personal life
- Your work schedule or times required for other responsibilities might interfere with your body's natural sleep schedule
- Habits, for example, staying up too late to watch TV or read a book.

Next, develop a plan and set goals. Your plan will be unique to you depending on the reasons for your sleep problem. A plan may be as straightforward as setting an alarm clock to remind yourself to go to bed, if you tend to stay up too late. A plan may be more involved if you have PTSD or other issue needing more time to work on. The Whole Health handouts "[Hints for Encouraging Healthy Sleep](#)" and "[Change Your Habits to Sleep Better](#)" give many ideas to try. Consider talking with your health care team if you would like help developing a plan and setting goals.

What is a good way to set a goal?

Consider writing a SMART goal. SMART stands for

- **S**pecific: what exactly will you do?

- **Measurable:** how much and how often will you do it?
- **Action-oriented:** what action will you take?
- **Realistic:** is this a goal you can achieve?
- **Timed:** when will you start and when will you end?

Also, ask yourself the following questions:

- What might get in the way of accomplishing your plan?
- How will you work around that difficulty?

How are rest and relaxation different from sleep?

Rest and relaxation are things you do while you are awake to help refresh yourself.

How may I be healthier if I get enough rest and relaxation?

Taking breaks while you work can help in many ways. These include reducing stress, decreasing burnout, helping you get more done, and improving your ability to focus.⁸ Breaks may also help you prevent injuries, such as those you can develop when using your hands in the same way for a long time.⁸

The following are some findings from research about taking vacations:

- Ninety-six people were studied before, during, and after vacation.⁹ Most (60%) said their health and well-being were better during and after the vacation. Of course, doing something they enjoyed and not having something bad happen made a difference in their answers.
- More than 12,000 men who were at risk for heart disease were asked about taking vacations. Men who did not take a vacation each year were more likely to die from any cause during the nine years they were studied.¹⁰

What are some things I can do to rest and relax?

There are many ways to rest and relax. Choose some that fit your interests and lifestyle. Consider the following:

- Allow yourself time for leisure, creativity, and hobbies or other interests outside of work.
- Pace yourself during daily tasks.
- Practice a breathing exercise. One simple method is called “4-7-8 breathing.”
 - Breathe in for a count of 4.
 - Hold the breath for a count of 7.
 - Let the breath out slowly, for a count of 8.

Do not do this exercise if you think it will trigger breathing problems for you. Do it for only 2-3 breaths. Go back to breathing normally right away if you feel lightheaded at all.

- Meditate, pray, or make a habit of having a mindful, quiet time.
- Practice progressive relaxation. This involves relaxing all of the muscles in your body in order, one group at a time. You can do this by first tensing a muscle and then relaxing it. This helps teach you how muscles feel when they are tense. A second way is to focus on relaxing the muscles without tensing them first.

- Use guided imagery. Guided imagery uses your imagination. You can sit or lie down with your eyes closed and listen to a recording. It usually has soft music and a soothing voice. Two recordings to consider are “Relaxation and Wellness” and “Sleep” located on the [website of Kaiser Permanente](#).

You can find more information on breathing, meditation, and progressive relaxation in the Whole Health section on “[Power of the Mind](#).”

How can I rest and relax when I spend a lot of my day at work?

Here are a few ways to help you rest and relax while at work.

- Use your vacation time each year to have a break totally away from work.
- Take breaks during your workday.⁸
 - Be clear about your workplace’s break policy, and discuss it with your supervisor, as needed.
 - Build break time into your daily schedule. Try to take a 5-minute break every 30-60 minutes. Take a 15-minute break in the middle of the morning and the afternoon. You can set a clock, watch, smartphone, or computer to remind yourself when it’s break time.
 - Choose how you will spend your break time. You can do nothing, stretch, have a healthy snack, take a moment for mindful awareness, listen to music, or even take a power nap.
 - Go to a different location during breaks to help make a clean break from work.

For more information on taking breaks, refer to the Whole Health handout “[The Health Benefits of Pausing and Taking Breaks](#).”

How can I help myself if I’m not getting enough rest and relaxation, so I can be my best?

You can follow the same process as outlined for sleep on pages 2 and 3. First, try to understand why you’re not getting enough rest and relaxation. What’s getting in the way of your scheduling this time for yourself? Then develop a plan and set a goal to work towards.

For you to consider:

- How do you usually do with this area of self-care?
- If Recharge is a concern for you, do you have trouble sleeping or resting/relaxing or both?
- What ideas have you tried in the past? Did any of these ideas help?
- Would you like help regarding Recharge from your health care team?
- If so, who will you contact? When will you contact them?

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.**

For more information:

ORGANIZATION	RESOURCES	WEBSITE
Veterans Health Administration	A variety of Whole Health handouts on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sleep and becoming refreshed under the Recharge section • Ways to use the mind to rest and relax under the Power of the Mind section. 	https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/veteran-handouts/index.asp
VA "Whole Health" website	Video "A Patient Centered Approach to Recharge," 6 th video in "Components of Health and Well-Being" Video Series	https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/circle-of-health/recharge.asp
VA Make the Connection website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information and videos on trouble sleeping 	http://maketheconnection.net/symptoms/trouble-sleeping
National Sleep Foundation	Information and videos	www.sleepfoundation.org
Kaiser Permanente	Guided imagery podcasts. Note especially the ones "Relaxation and Wellness" and "Sleep."	https://healthy.kaiserpermanente.org/health-wellness/podcasts?kp_shortcut_referrer=kp.org/listen

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