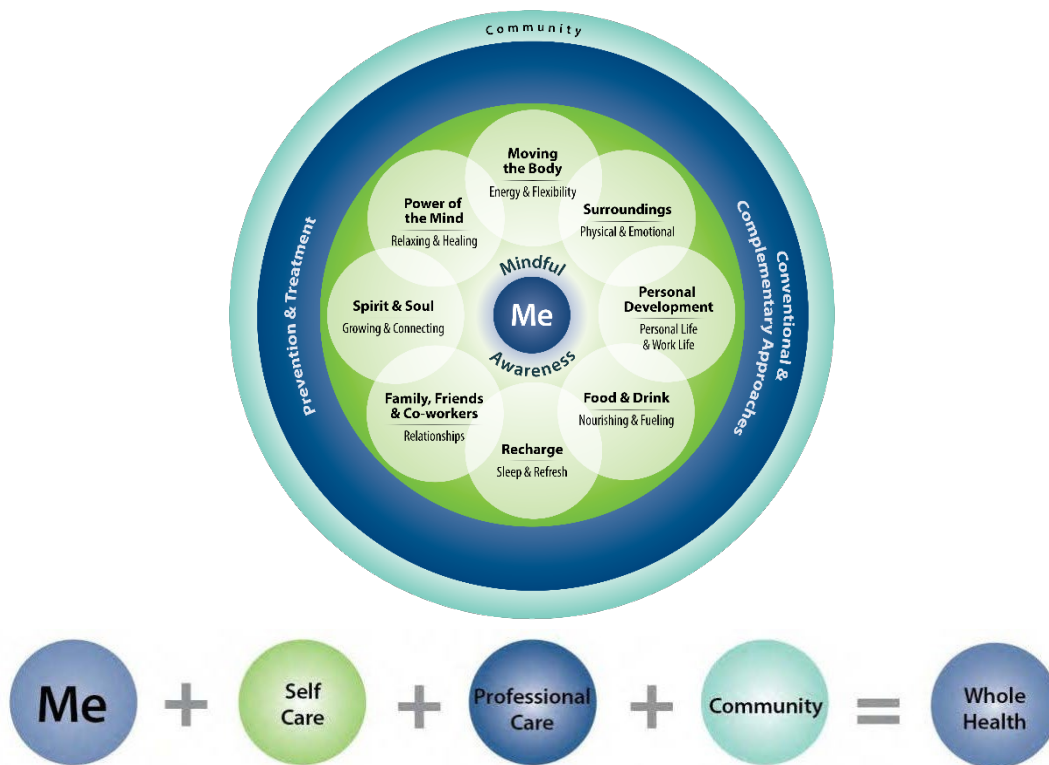


WHOLE HEALTH: INFORMATION FOR VETERANS

Precautions with Using Mindful Awareness Practices



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/>

Precautions with Using Mindful Awareness Practices

What are mindful awareness practices?

Mindful awareness is paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgmentally.¹ You can learn more about mindful awareness by reading the Whole Health handout, "[An Introduction to Mindful Awareness](#)." Mindful awareness practices are exercises that you can do to become more aware and live in the present moment.

How can I learn mindful awareness practices?

Mindfulness has been practiced for thousands of years in many different cultures and traditions such as Buddhism, Christianity, etc. It has changed over the years. Now, it is often taught without a religious connection.^{1,2} There are many different mindful awareness practices and ways to learn these practices. Courses, classes, audio recordings, websites, and books are some of the options. One of the more popular ways to learn about mindful awareness practices is through the eight-week mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) course. This course is offered in many places around the United States. Many VA medical centers offer mindfulness training. Contact the VA medical center in your area to learn if classes are offered there. The Whole Health handout, "[Mindful Awareness Practice in Daily Living](#)" describes mindful awareness practices that you can do.

What should I be aware of when doing mindful awareness practices?

Anyone can benefit from mindful awareness practices. The following are some things to think about before you start doing one:³⁻⁵

- Many thoughts, feelings and emotions may come up when you are practicing. These might include happiness, comfort, calmness, as well as stress, anxiety, fear, panic, or discomfort.
- Mindful awareness practices help you to be in the present moment. For many people, becoming aware of the present moment may not feel comforting or safe. If there has been abuse or trauma in your life, you can have feelings, thoughts and emotions connected to that experience.
- You also may feel discomfort in your body when you are practicing.
- Mindful awareness practices need be repeated and continued to receive the full benefits. It helps to set aside time to practice.
- Practicing mindful awareness requires patience. The benefits don't come after practicing just once. You have to keep exercising your "mindfulness muscle."
- Be aware of what you think will happen when you start practicing mindful awareness. If you think this practice will change everything or it won't do anything, your thoughts may affect your experience.

It is always your decision if you want to practice mindful awareness. If you have any further concerns or questions about mindful awareness practice, speak with your health care team.

How can I feel more comfortable about starting a mindful awareness practice?

Mindful awareness practices can be helpful for many people. The following are a few ways to work with any difficulties you might have when you first start:⁴⁻⁶

- Try practicing in a group or taking a class. This way you can discuss how things are going and have the support of other people.
- You do not have to practice only while seated. You can also try a walking or movement practice, such as yoga.
- If you feel uneasy when practicing, go back to the basics of mindful awareness: be aware, present, and non-judgmental. You can come back to your “anchor.” This may be your breath or another sensation in the body. Mindful awareness can help you work through some of the thoughts, feelings and emotions that come up when you are practicing.
- If you have any mental health challenges, start your practice under the guidance of a professional.
- If you are taking a course, speak with your teacher or assistants.
- Continue to practice, and be patient with yourself.

For you to consider:

- Do you have any concerns before starting a mindful awareness practice?
- Do you have support for any emotions, thoughts, or feelings that may come up while practicing mindful awareness?
- How do you think a mindful awareness practice could help you?

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 mindful awareness including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Introduction to Mindful Awareness • Mindful Awareness Practices in Daily Living 	https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/veteran-handouts/index.asp
VA "Whole Health" website "Circle of Health"	Whole Health website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional videos on mindfulness • Audio files and podcasts on guided meditation 	https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/circle-of-health/mindful-awareness.asp <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Click on “Video Resources” • Click on “Guided Meditation Audio Files”

Precautions with Using Mindful Awareness Practices

ORGANIZATION	RESOURCES	WEBSITE
Veterans Health Administration	Mindfulness Coach App (Designed to help Veterans, Service-members, and others learn to practice mindfulness.)	https://mobile.va.gov/app/mindfulness-coach

This handout was written for the Veteran's Health Administration (VHA) by Mara Motley, MD, Academic Integrative Health Fellow, 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.

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