Relaxing the Body

Relaxation techniques can help reduce tension in our bodies. Progressive muscle relaxation works through two steps: tensing certain muscle groups and then releasing or relaxing those muscles.

TEAM UP:

Try the following muscle relaxation technique.

- **Step 1 (Tension):** Take a slow, deep breath and clench your feet and legs for 5 seconds.
- **Step 2 (Relaxation):** Relax the tensed muscles and exhale. Feel the tension flow out. Notice the difference between the tensed and relaxed state. Repeat the tension-relaxation one more time.

While at home, practice muscle relaxation using the above technique. Focus on the following muscle groups:

- Feet and legs
- Neck and shoulders
- Hands and arms
- Face

Practicing progressive muscle relaxation for 10 to 15 minutes daily will help you gain a skill for managing stress. Once you have mastered this skill, you can use it whenever you need to relax.

Resources

There is a lot of information available on stress problems, but where can you find the most up to date information?

- University of Texas – Stress Management and Reduction
  http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/stressrecess
- Helpguide for Stress
  http://www.helpguide.org/topics/stress.htm
- American Psychological Association – Mind Body Health
  http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress.aspx
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
  http://www.guidetopsychology.com/pmr.htm

Do You Need More Help?

If you feel your stress level has reached the point where you need more help, please contact your VA provider to schedule an appointment to consider treatment options and referrals. In the case of a life-threatening emergency, call 911 or go to the emergency room of your local hospital or the VA.

South Central MIRECC

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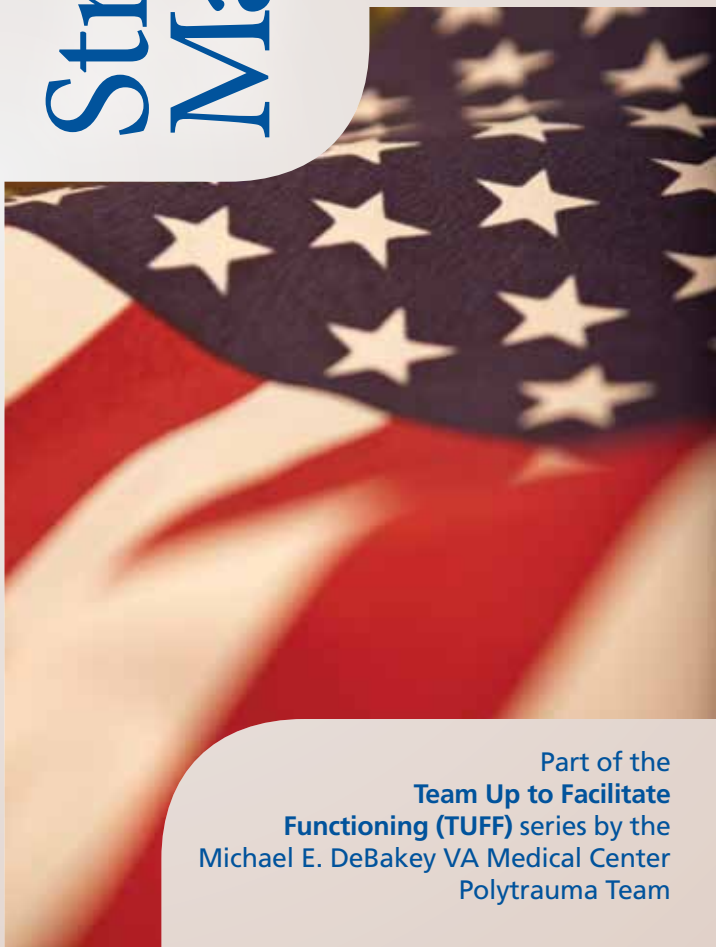
For more information contact Michael.Kauth@va.gov or go to www.mirecc.va.gov/visn16

MICHAEL E. DeBAKEY VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER

Stress Management



Part of the **Team Up to Facilitate Functioning (TUFF)** series by the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center Polytrauma Team

UNDERSTANDING & MANAGING STRESS

What Is Stress?

Stress is a natural response to anything that is painful, overwhelming, threatening, difficult or unexpected. For example, a significant change in your life, such as moving, starting a new job, or returning to school can cause stress. Stress can lead to or worsen many problems in life.

Signs of Stress

TEAM UP:

Are you having any of these problems?

- ❏ Fatigue
- ❏ Headaches/muscle tension
- ❏ Upset stomach
- ❏ Difficulty sleeping
- ❏ Concentration problems
- ❏ Difficulty making decisions
- ❏ Worry
- ❏ Nervousness
- ❏ Irritability
- ❏ Feeling overwhelmed

Although stress may not be the cause of all these problems, the presence of stress can make these problems worse.

Managing Stress

There are many stress management techniques. Using a combination of techniques is often the most effective for gaining control over the stress in your life.

Exercise

Exercise is one of the most effective ways to counteract your body's stress response. Be sure to consult with your medical provider if you are considering participating in a new and strenuous exercise routine.

TEAM UP:

What types of exercise did you enjoy in the past or would you like to do more often?

- ❏ Jogging
- ❏ Bicycling
- ❏ Walking
- ❏ Swimming
- ❏ Weight training
- ❏ Stretching and yoga
- ❏ Other: _____

Take a minute to plan your involvement in at least one of the activities listed above.

Excercise: _____

Duration: _____

Times/Week: _____

Time Management

Do you find that you are chasing deadlines or wasting time on things that are unimportant? Time management strategies can help focus your energy on your priorities and reduce stress.

The following techniques will also help you to effectively manage your time.

- ***Plan your day.*** Write a to do list and keep a schedule of your daily activities.
- ***Prioritize your tasks.*** This will help you save time and energy for tasks that are important to you.
- ***Try the 10-minute rule.*** Commit to working on a dreaded task for 10 minutes per day. Once you get started, you may find that the task is not nearly as bad as it seems.

TEAM UP:

Which of the above time management techniques will help you the most?

Making a log of your daily activities may be helpful in determining how you can better organize your time.

Stress Management