VETERANS WELLNESS GUIDE

VA

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration

ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

What is this?

This workbook is based on the science of well-being and is organized in short, easy-to-use activities.

Is this for me?

This is for any Veteran who is feeling tired, stressed, or wants to improve their well-being.

Why use it?

It could help you feel happier, less stressed, and more in control. What do you have to lose?

How to use it?

Flip through the guide, and see what it has to offer. Try what you would like at your own pace.

When to use it?

Whenever it works for you. Some activities can be used when you have just a minute or two, like when you are waiting in line at the grocery store.

What if you get stuck?

Come back to the activity at a later time. This is self-paced. SMART Goals can help you stay on track.

What topics are in it?

- Understanding Health: Summarizes health. Activities include understanding what makes you feel unhealthy and healthy.
- Managing Thoughts: Information about understanding your thoughts. Activities include keeping a gratitude journal and making your thoughts more positive.
- Making Every Moment Count: Focuses on what you can do to better your health. Examples are tips on exercising and mindful meditation.
- Sleeping Well: Has exercises to help you understand your sleep and think of ways to better your sleep schedule.
- Healthy Eating: Has activities to improve your eating habits. Activities include figuring out what foods make you feel good and finding ways to make your favorite recipes healthier.

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GOAL SETTING

Before we get started, let's look at goal setting.
SMART Goals can be used with any section in the guide

SMART GOALS

Setting goals and finishing tasks can be rewarding. Goals can include hobbies in which you want to participate.

Specific	Describe your goal as clearly and with as much detail as possible.	Jog/walk on trail around the lake in the morning before work
Measurable	Use a number or other way to objectively track your progress.	Jog/walk for 15 minutes, 4 times a week
Attainable	Make it challenging but something within reach.	I will be able to fit in at least 15 minutes of jogging/walking to my schedule
Realistic	Make sure it is something you can see yourself working towards	Jog/walk for 15 minutes at first, not 2 hours
Timely	Set a date for when your goal needs to be achieved.	Start on Saturday and continue for 2 months

SMART GOALS

Set up your own SMART goal!

My Goal —

Specific:

Measurable:

Attainable:

Revelant:

Timely:

UNDERSTANDING HEALTH

Being healthy lets you enjoy
family, friends, love, and money.

HEALTH IS: NOT JUST A LACK OF ILLNESS...

IT IS:

- Vitality
- Having energy to enjoy life
- Doing what makes you happy
- Having strength to face difficulties
- Making the best of your current physical, mental, and social state

WHAT DOES HEALTH MEAN TO YOU?

YOU HAVE CONTROL OVER MANY THINGS.

In situations in your life, you may feel like you don't have control.

- You have control over your own actions.
- Take time to think about situations in which you have control. Compare them to situations in which you may not have control. What do they have in common? How are they different?
- You get to decide how to act!
- For example, you can't help getting the flu. However, you control how you react to having the flu. You could eat healthy, drink lots of water, and rest or you could keep push- ing yourself, hurting your body.
- Healthy behaviors, such as getting enough sleep, can help you heal faster while unhealthy behaviors could make the flu worse.

Aspects of Your Life That You Can Control To Feel Healthier:

- Sleep Habits
- Work Life Balance
- Time Management
- Diet
- Your Thoughts
- Exercise

WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL...

You can control the activities you do that make you feel healthy or unhealthy. List these below to figure out the activities you should do more often and which ones to avoid.

HEALTHY	UNHEALTHY

MANAGING THOUGHTS

Thoughts are important to your health; your body listens and reacts to your thoughts.

SELF-COMPASSION

- Have you ever felt frustrated when things didn't go just the way you planned?
- Do you ever feel lonely, like you are the only one in the world making mistakes?

YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

MAKING MISTAKES IS PART OF BEING HUMAN.

YOU CAN PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION.

Self-compassion is what it sounds like. It is treating yourself with the same compassion you would treat another with. No matter how hard we try to be perfect, part of being human is hitting rough patches or making mistakes. When you have these human moments, treat yourself with kindness

- Self-compassion is being kind and understanding to yourself when you face hardships.
- An example of self-compassion is not comparing yourself to others when you are going through a tough time.
- We are often kinder to our friends than we are to ourselves. The next time you feel upset with yourself, ask what you might say to a friend in the same situation.

SELF-COMPASSION

Do you say things to yourself that you wouldn't say about your best friend?

Imagine a good friend feeling bad about themselves. How would you respond?

What words? _____

What tone? _____

What feelings?_____

Imagine a time you were feeling bad about yourself. How would you respond?

What words? _____

What tone? _____

What feelings?_____

Is there a difference?

What words? _____

What tone? _____

What feelings?_____

Why?

_____

_____

What would change if you talked to yourself the way you would to a friend?

_____

_____

CRITICIZING THOUGHTS VS. COMPASSIONATE THOUGHTS

Example: Javier's back hurt much worse than usual, and he couldn't make it to his son's football game.

CRITICIZING THOUGHTS	COMPASSIONATE THOUGHTS
I'm worthless	I am in a lot of pain, and my doctor said that if I don't take it easy on bad days I can hurt myself more.
I'm the worst father.	I am doing the best that I can now
My son hates me.	When my son comes home, I will tell him how much I love him and ask him for a play by play.

POSITIVE THINKING

- When in hard situations, it is human nature to shut off the world.
- Being positive will not take away hardships but will help you to move forward.
- **You have control over only your thoughts when facing these situations.**
- Positivity is seeing the best in situations.
- People who think positively are more creative when solving problems.
- Being positive is easier said than done. You have to practice positivity.

RECONSTRUCTING POSITIVE THOUGHTS

Think about a time when something happened to you and you reacted negatively. How could you have reacted in a more positive way, and how would that have helped your situation?

SITUATION	NEGATIVE THOUGHT	ALTERNATIVE POSITIVE THOUGHT
Example: Flat tire before work	Nothing good ever happens to me.	I was able to fix it/call emergency assistance

Remember, you will face hardships; but you have control over your mindset.

USING THIRD-PERSON PERSPECTIVE

It is easy to get caught up in your problems without thinking about the big picture. **Thinking about your struggles as a neutral person (fly on the wall) who wants the best for both you and the other person could help.**

Write about something that bothered you recently. Use facts to describe the situation.

Example: My boss is giving me much more work and responsibility than others in similar positions. This makes me angry and feel like she is taking advantage of me.

Think about this situation as a third-party (fly on the wall) who wants the best for all and who can see things from both sides. How might they see things differently?

Example: My boss has a high-priority project with which she needs my help and trusts that I have the skills to get the job done right.

Using the third-party point of view can help with future conflict. What roadblocks might you face using an outsider's perspective in the future? What can you do to overcome those roadblocks?

Example: Roadblocks—When I get angry it is hard for me to think about anything else. Overcome—Go for a walk to cool down and think about what your third party might say.

PERSEVERANCE AND POSITIVITY

Perseverance is doing something even though it is hard. Facing obstacles can make us stronger. **Write about a time when you learned from an obstacle.** This positive approach can help when you face other hardships.

Example: Joe's company is updating software and will let anyone go who does not learn the new software. He has heard from others that the software is hard to use and is worried that he will not be smart enough to learn it. A week after training, he is still struggling after putting in many late nights and is thinking about quitting his job. Joe reminded himself that he has learned many new tasks since he first started at the company. With this positive outlook, he felt more determined to keep working on learning the software. He started taking notes and after a week of staying late at work, the work got easier. He kept persevering and eventually mastered the software.

ACTS OF KINDNESS AND POSITIVITY

**Helping others can have a positive effect on yourself.
Describe what you did or what you can do.**

ACT	FEELING
Donated blood during blood drive	Satisfied and helpful

LOOKING FOR OPPORTUNITIES FOR KINDNESS?

- Check in with an elderly neighbor—what help do they need around the house?
- Volunteer at an animal shelter.
- Look up your local "The Mission Continues" to volunteer with Vets in your area.

GRATITUDE

- A gratitude journal is where you note down the things in your life for which you are grateful.
- Keep a notebook by your bed. At the end of the day, write down a few things that happened that day for which you're grateful.
- There is nothing too big or too small to put down in the gratitude journal.

EXAMPLE:

1. I had a nice conversation with my friend today.
2. I got promoted at work.
3. My coffee tasted extra good today.
4. The weather was nice, and it looked beautiful outside.

GRATITUDE JOURNAL

Day 1. Today I am grateful for....

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Day 2. Today I am grateful for....

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Day 3. Today I am grateful for....

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Day 4. Today I am grateful for....

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

GRATITUDE JOURNAL

Day 5. Today I am grateful for....

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Day 6. Today I am grateful for....

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Day 7. Today I am grateful for....

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

After completing a week of journaling, what stands out to you?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

GRATITUDE VISIT

Pick a person:

Think of someone who did something for you for which you are grateful but never really told them. It could be a friend, colleague, or just about anyone. It may be someone you haven't seen in awhile.

Plan a visit:

Try to meet with the person face to face. If you cannot, try to video chat. Let the person know you have something to share, but don't let them know what it is.

What to write:

Start the letter with "Dear _____" and write a letter to your friend. Write exactly what the person did, why you are grateful, and how this action affected your life. If you haven't seen that person in a while, let them know what you are doing in your life now and how often you remember their actions. Try to keep the letter to just one page.

At the visit:

Tell the person you are grateful for them and you'd like to share a letter you wrote. Read the letter slowly, out loud to the person. Be open to their reaction.

At the end of the visit:

Remember to give your friend the letter.

MINDFULNESS

- Mindfulness is being present through the **understanding** of our feelings and senses.
- When you feel an uncomfortable emotion, don't avoid it. Instead, **try to experience the feeling**. Do not judge what you are feeling. **Accept it**. Understand why it's there, and then let it go.

FEELING	WHY DO I FEEL THIS WAY?
Anxious	I'm in a very crowded location.

RESOURCES

You can download these apps from the Apple App Store or the Google Play Store.

MOOD COACH APP
Mood Coach is an app to help you boost your mood through positive activities.

ACT COACH APP
Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) helps you live with unpleasant feelings and impulses without avoiding them or being controlled by them.

ANGER AND IRRITABILITY MANAGEMENT SKILLS (AIMS) APP
AIMS is designed to help you with anger problems.

MAKING EVERY MOMENT COUNT

Being active on a daily basis is important.
Activity fuels more activity.

HOBBIES

What activites do you enjoy?

What is keeping you from doing these activities?

What activities have you alwayd wanted to try?

How will you add a new activity to your schedule?

WAYS TO BE MORE ACTIVE

- Find an activity you like to do.
- Let loose — being active is about having fun.
- Set goals and keep track of your progress.
- When you reach a goal, treat yourself.

GOAL:	BY WHEN?	REWARD:
1. Complete a box as first woodworking project	1 month	Have a steak for dinner
2.		
3.		
4.		

FINDING SOLUTIONS FOR OBSTACLES TO REACHING GOALS

Running into problems is normal, but finding solutions to help you reach your goal will keep you on track.

BARRIERS	SOLUTION
Not sure where my sneakers are	Will find my sneakers and put them by the front door

TIME MANAGEMENT

Managing time well is important to make the most of your day, including doing the things you enjoy.

TIPS:

- Worried about how long something will take? Just start!
- Break big projects into small goals.
- Make a to do list.
- It's okay to say no to others.
- Find what works best for you.

KEEPING A TIME JOURNAL:

- We often do not realize how we use our time. The next pages have a time journal. In each box, put what you do during that time of the day.
- This journal will help you see where your time goes. It could help you be more productive or find more time for enjoyable activities.

WHERE DOES MY TIME GO?

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
6 AM			
7 AM			
8 AM			
9 AM			
10 AM			
11 AM			
12 PM			
1 PM			
2 PM			
3 PM			
4 PM			
5 PM			
6 PM			
7 PM			
8 PM			
9 PM			
10 PM			
11 PM			

WHERE DOES MY TIME GO?

Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

TIME REFLECTION

1. **After filling out the weekly activity journal, where do you find yourself spending the most time?**

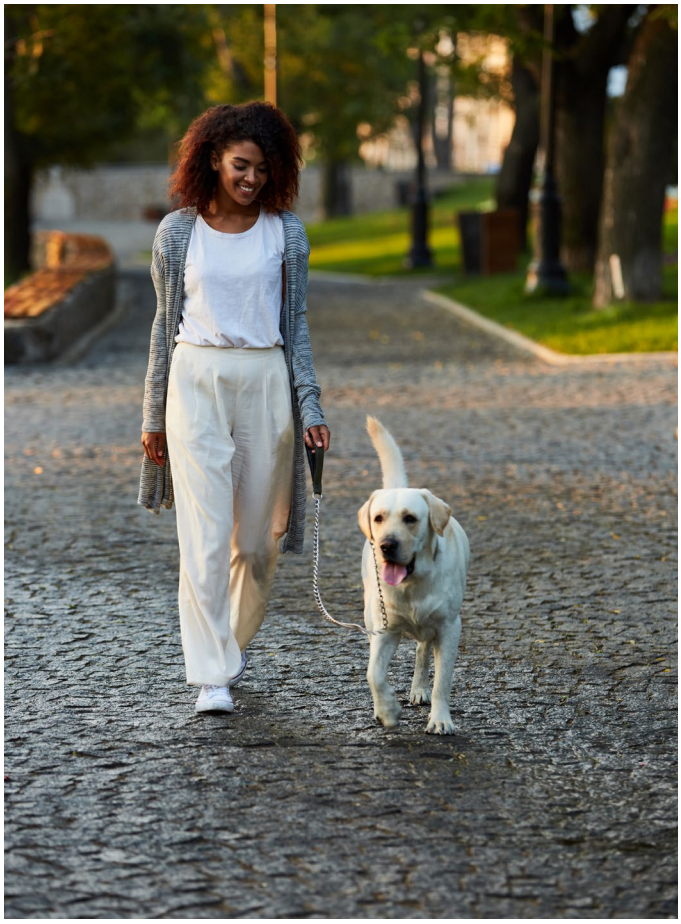
2. **Are there things on which you spend too little or too much time?**

3. **How can you find more time for activites you like?**

EXERCISE – EVERY LITTLE BIT HELPS

TRY:

- Walking
- Swimming
- Taking the stairs
- Dancing
- Gardening
- Playing with your pets
- Doing yoga
- Using a desk bike



What are your favorite ways to get your heart pumping?

_____

_____

How do you feel after you exercise?

_____

_____

WAYS TO INCREASE EXERCISE

- Schedule exercise ahead of time.
- It's okay to have smaller chunks of exercise throughout the day. Three 10 minute walks can be as good as one 30 minute walk.
- Listen to music while walking.
- Every little bit counts. Try taking the stairs or parking in a spot farther away.
- Don't overdo it. Going from couch potato to marathon runner overnight is not realistic.

Steps to take to fit exercise into my day:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Don't know how to start? Check out Couch to 5k at **www.c25k.com**

FRIENDS

**Keeping in touch with your friends could be a goal.
Call one of your friends and talk to them!**

REFLECT

How do you feel after talking with a friend?

How can you increase the time you spend with your friends?

DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START?

Ask about something good that happened in your friend's day or tell your friend about this wellness guide

SPEND TIME OUTSIDE

Being outside can be energizing. When you go outside, pay attention to what you hear, see, smell, feel, and taste. Senses can make you feel different emotions. What do you observe?

SENSATION	HOW DO YOU FEEL?
Hear	
See	
Smell	
Feel	
Taste	

MEDITATION

Meditation is a helpful way to observe what you are feeling.

HOW TO MEDITATE:

- Sit with your legs crossed on the floor or with your back straight on a chair.
- Try to be in a relaxing environment without distractions like a TV or radio.
- Focus on one aspect of your breathing. This could be the air flowing out of your mouth, your stomach moving up or down, or anything else.
- It is normal for your mind to wander! If you notice that your mind is wandering, that is okay! Shift your focus to your breathing again.
- Do not wrestle with your thoughts, though. If they arise, observe and turn your thoughts back to your breath, but don't react. Listen to them without judgment.
- When you are ready and your time is done, open your eyes slowly and pay attention to the environment around you.

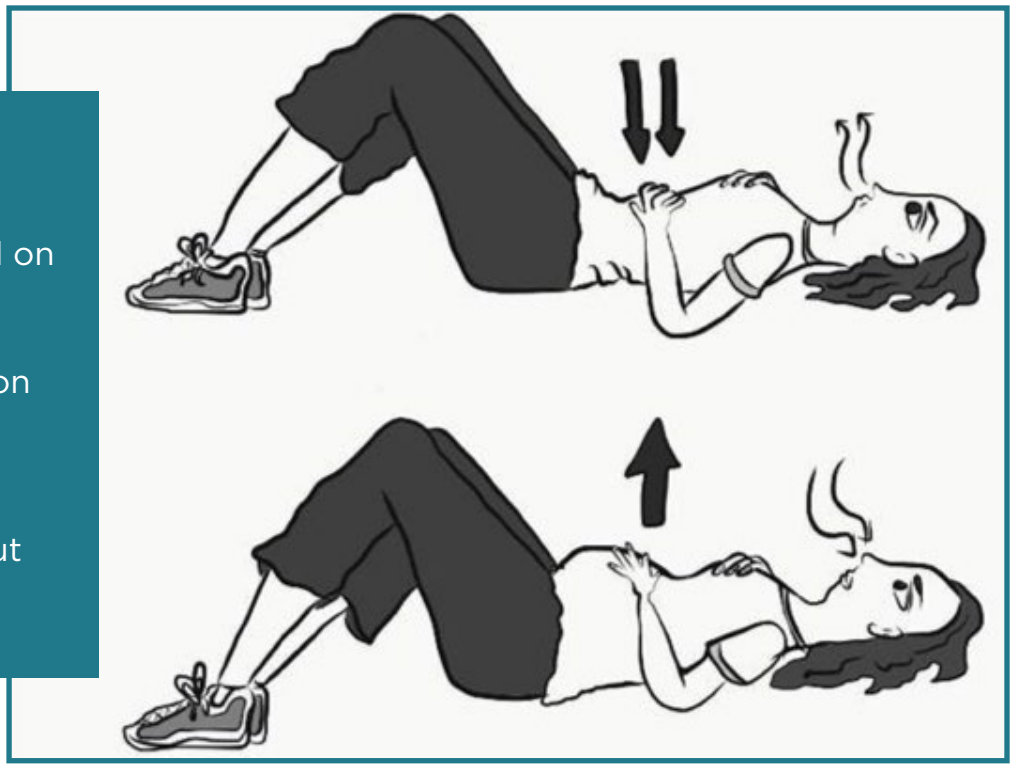
BELLY BREATHING

Belly breathing can help you let go of some of your tensions for a short time. Try this break when sitting in traffic or waiting in line at the grocery store.

- Gently, begin to breathe so that one hand on your stomach rises and falls with each inhale and exhale. (Pause for a few breaths...)
- Start by making one or two full exhalations that push air from the bottom of
- your lungs.
- Inhale through your nose and imagine filling up your stomach like a balloon fills up with air.
- Exhale and imagine the balloon letting go of air.
- If your stomach doesn't move very much, then your breathing is from your chest. If your stomach moves, you are breathing from your belly. You are breathing deeply.

QUICK EXERCISE

1. Place your right hand on your stomach.
2. Place your left hand on your chest.
3. Breathe and notice which hand moves out the farthest.



WHAT RELAXES YOU?

Relaxation can be done in many ways, such as meditation or taking your dog for a walk. Take some time and do the things that make you feel relaxed. List what relaxes you below.

ACTIVITY	HOW LONG ACTIVITY TAKES	HOW ACTIVITY WILL BE DONE

LAUGHTER

On the next two pages is a funny things journal.

Write down the three funniest things that you experienced or did and an explanation why those things happened on every day for one week.

LAUGHTER IS A GOOD WAY TO FEEL MORE RELAXED!

It reduces stress, lowers pain, helps the immune system function, and improves mood.

Want to laugh more?

- Play with a pet.
- Watch a funny movie.
- Call a friend to see if they have any silly stories to share

THREE FUNNY THINGS JOURNAL

Day 1. Today these things happened

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Day 2. Today these things happened

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Day 3. Today these things happened

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Day 4. Today these things happened

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

THREE FUNNY THINGS JOURNAL

Day 5. Today these things happened

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Day 6. Today these things happened

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Day 7. Today these things happened

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

After completing a week of journaling, what stands out to you?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

RAPID VITALITY BREAKS

Rapid vitality breaks can help you relax! Take a break the next time you feel overwhelmed. Even a few minutes can lift your mood.

- Take a deep breath (belly breathing).
- Reach out to a friend.
- Go outside.
- Be grateful.
- Be kind to yourself.
- Laugh.
- Listen to your body.
- Go for a walk.
- Listen to music.

RESOURCES

You can download these apps from the Apple App Store or the Google Play Store.

MOVE! COACH APP

This is a helpful weight loss app for Veterans, service members, their families, and those who want to lose weight.

MINDFULNESS COACH 2 APP

Mindfulness Coach 2 provides a self guided training program for a simple mindfulness practice.

VETERAN TAI CHI:
http://bit.ly/2H78AZh

This YouTube video contains a full Tai Chi routine. Tai Chi can help with reducing stress and improving your mood. You can also find it by searching “Rural MIRECC Tai Chi” on YouTube.

MOVE! WEIGHT MANAGEMENT VIDEOS:
http://bit.ly/2VqMYkw

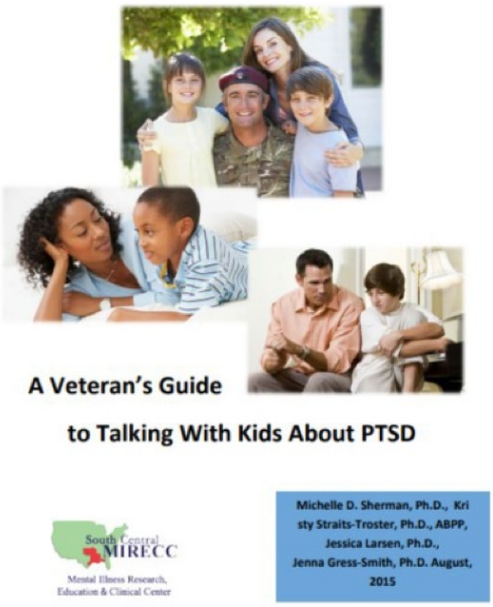
This website has videos as well as handouts to help you lose weight and stay healthy. You can also find it by searching “MOVE! Weight Management” on Google.

FAMILY RESOURCES

A VETERAN'S GUIDE TO TALKING WITH KIDS ABOUT PTSD

This is an honest and gentle guide in encouraging Veterans to consider their hopes and fears in talking with their kids about posttraumatic stress disorder.

http://bit.ly/2J6EFCH



THE VETERAN PARENTING TOOLKIT

Includes five sets of age-specific parenting materials for young Veteran parents and their partners.

http://bit.ly/2XOBLL0

SLEEPING WELL

Sleep plays an important role in your physical and mental health.

WHY IS SLEEP SO IMPORTANT?

Getting 7-8 hours of sleep is the recommended time for sleep each night. Are you getting that amount of sleep?

- Sleep gives your body a chance to rest and prepare for the next day.
- During sleep, muscles in the body grow and are repaired.
- People who sleep for the recommended hours are able to accomplish more in the day.
- Getting a good amount of sleep can lead to fewer mistakes during work.
- Too little sleep is linked to many illnesses, such as heart disease,
- kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and stroke.
- Sleep can help lower cravings for unhealthy foods.

BEDTIME DO'S AND DON'TS

DO'S:

- Get out of bed if you do not fall asleep within 15 minutes.
- Exercise, but during midday or early afternoon.
- Use the bed only for sleep and intimacy.
- Find a regular time to wake up.

DON'T:

- Eat or drink anything that could keep you awake, such as soda
- or coffee.
- Use alcohol and nicotine before going to sleep.
- Take naps in late afternoon and evening.
- Eat big meals close to bedtime.
- Drink a lot of fluid before going to sleep.
- Lie in bed for a long time after you wake up.
- Eat, read, or watch TV in bed.

SLEEP HABITS

If you have trouble getting the sleep you need, then "sleep hygiene" can be helpful. Sleep hygiene is habits that help with good nighttime sleep quality.

What does your bedtime look like now?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

START A BED TIME RITUAL

- Take a bath.
- Read a book before you sleep.
- Turn off the lights.
- Turn your phone on “do not disturb.”
- Put on your pajamas.
- Use lavender essential oil.
- Try behavioral/relaxation techniques to assist with physical and mental relaxation.

RESOURCES

Cognitive-behavior therapy-Insomnia (CBT-I) helps you change your sleep behavior. The resources below can help guide you in making those changes. CBT-I works better than sleep medications in the long term. If you have any questions, please talk with your provider.

CBT-I COACH APP
This app is for people who are participating in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia, with a health provider. It will help users learn about sleep, have positive sleep routines, and improve their sleep environments. You can download this app from the Apple App or Google Play Store.

CBT-I ONLINE RESOURCE: http://bit.ly/2Yo4m6T

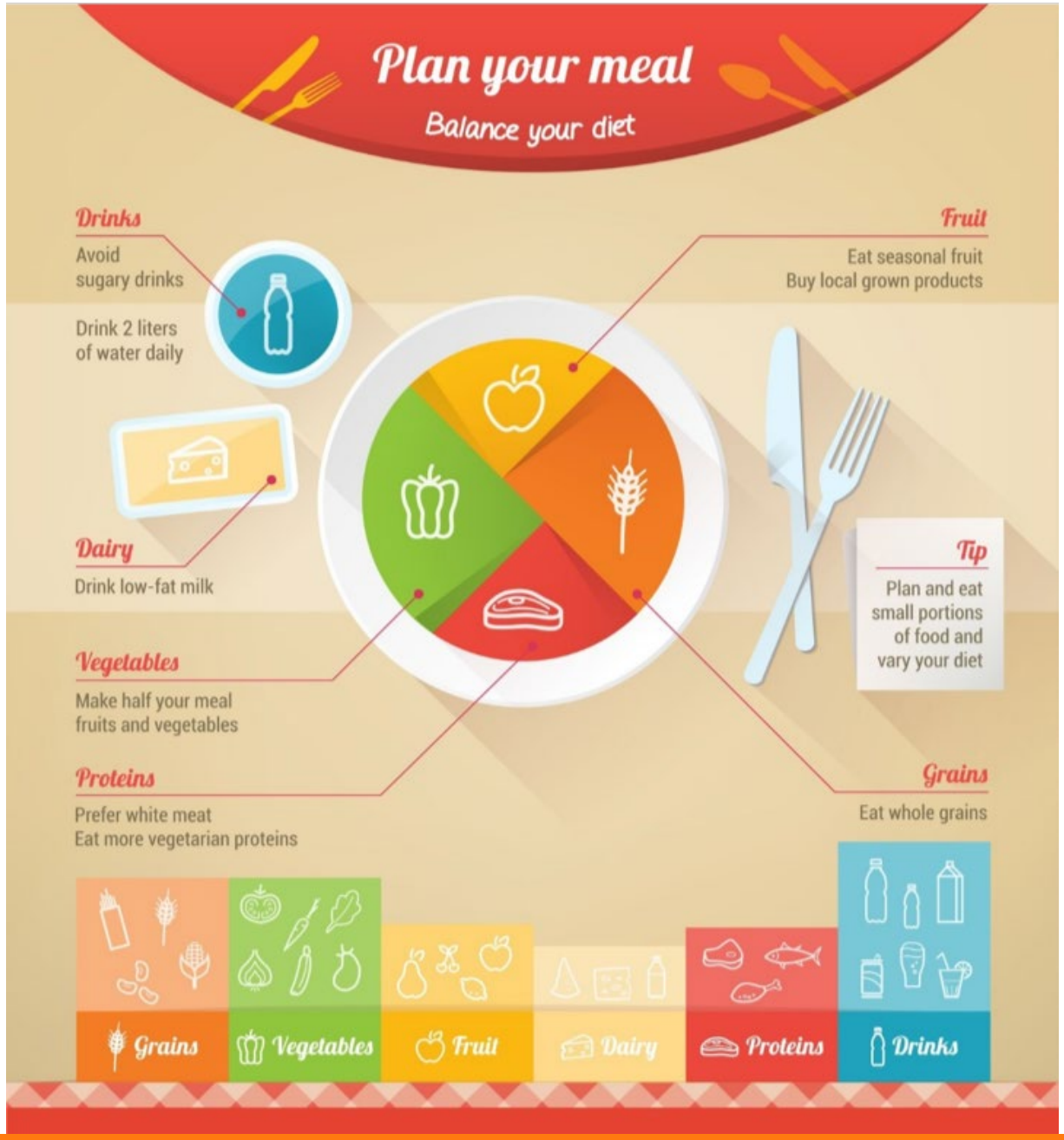
This activity helps people who have insomnia by giving a roadmap of activities to complete. You can use this activity on your own.

HEALTHY EATING

A balanced diet is needed
for your body to work properly.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALTHY EATING

- A diet that is not well rounded can stress the body!
- Foods with a lot of sugar and salt put a person at more risk for diseases, such as diabetes and high blood pressure.
- Food also affects mood. Eating healthy is important to your overall well-being.
- Look at the chart below to add different foods to make a healthy Plate.



MINDFUL EATING

Mindful eating is eating with both attention and intention. You can get benefits such as stopping yourself from eating too much, managing your weight, and letting yourself to enjoy your food.

- Turn off the TV and reduce distractions.
- Look at your plate. What colors do you see?
- Pick up a bite and notice the smells before eating.
- When you take a bite, put your fork down and close your eyes.
- What tastes do you notice?
  - » Bitter
  - » Sweet
  - » Salty
  - » Sour
- What textures do you notice?
  - » Creamy
  - » Crunchy
  - » Greasy
- Slowly chew your bite. Pay attention to the experience!
- Ask yourself if you are still hungry—if you are still hungry, take another bite.

WHEN AND WHAT TO EAT

WHEN TO EAT

- Start your day off with breakfast.
- Don't eat big meals before bedtime.
- Eat when you are hungry, not when you are bored, sad, or
- Worried.
- Start an eating routine, and eat every day at those times.

WHAT TO EAT

- Eat the rainbow – add differently colored food to your meals.
- Swap soda for water – add lemon or mint for some flavor.
- Use a smaller plate if you are still hungry.
- Challenge yourself to eat healthy.

RECIPE MAKEOVER

- Grill or sauté instead of frying.
- Substitute applesauce for butter while baking.
- Add more veggies.

CURRENT FAVORITE RECIPE UNHEALTHY INGREDIENT(S)	HEALTHIER VERSION

FOOD DIARY

List the foods that you eat for a week. Be honest!

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Breakfast			
Lunch			
Dinner			
Snacks			
Drinks			

FOOD DIARY

Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

FOOD DIARY REFLECTIONS

Reflect on how you can better your diet after writing down what you eat for a week.

FEELING OVERWHELMED?

Having thoughts of hurting yourself and/or others?

Whatever's got you down — chronic pain, anxiety, depression, sleeplessness, anger, or ever-disturbing memories of your tour of duty — a specially trained responder can provide support day or night.

Call 1-800-273-8255 Press 1

Chat https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat

Text 838255

Crisis call, chat, and text are free, anonymous, confidential resources that are available to any Service member, including members of the National Guard and Reserve, and any Veteran, even if you're not registered with VA or enrolled in VA health care.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:
www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/resources.asp