

How Thoughts and Behaviors Relate to Mood



This shows how behaviors (the things we do) and thoughts (the things we tell ourselves) interact and affect mood (how we feel). And in turn, the way we feel can affect what we do and how we think. You can improve your mood by learning skills to help you think and act in new ways.

Meet Dave



Dave is a 65-year-old Army Veteran who suffered a back injury two years ago and is unable to work. He became distant from his family and believed his life has little meaning or purpose.



- *I feel down.*
- *I lack motivation.*
- *I feel unproductive.*
- *I'm tired all the time.*
- *I'm stressed out about finances.*



- *I've stopped talking to friends and family.*
- *I spend a lot of the day watching TV.*
- *I eat junk food to try to make myself feel better.*



- *I can't do anything anymore.*
- *I let my family down.*
- *My life is a failure.*
- *No one can understand me.*

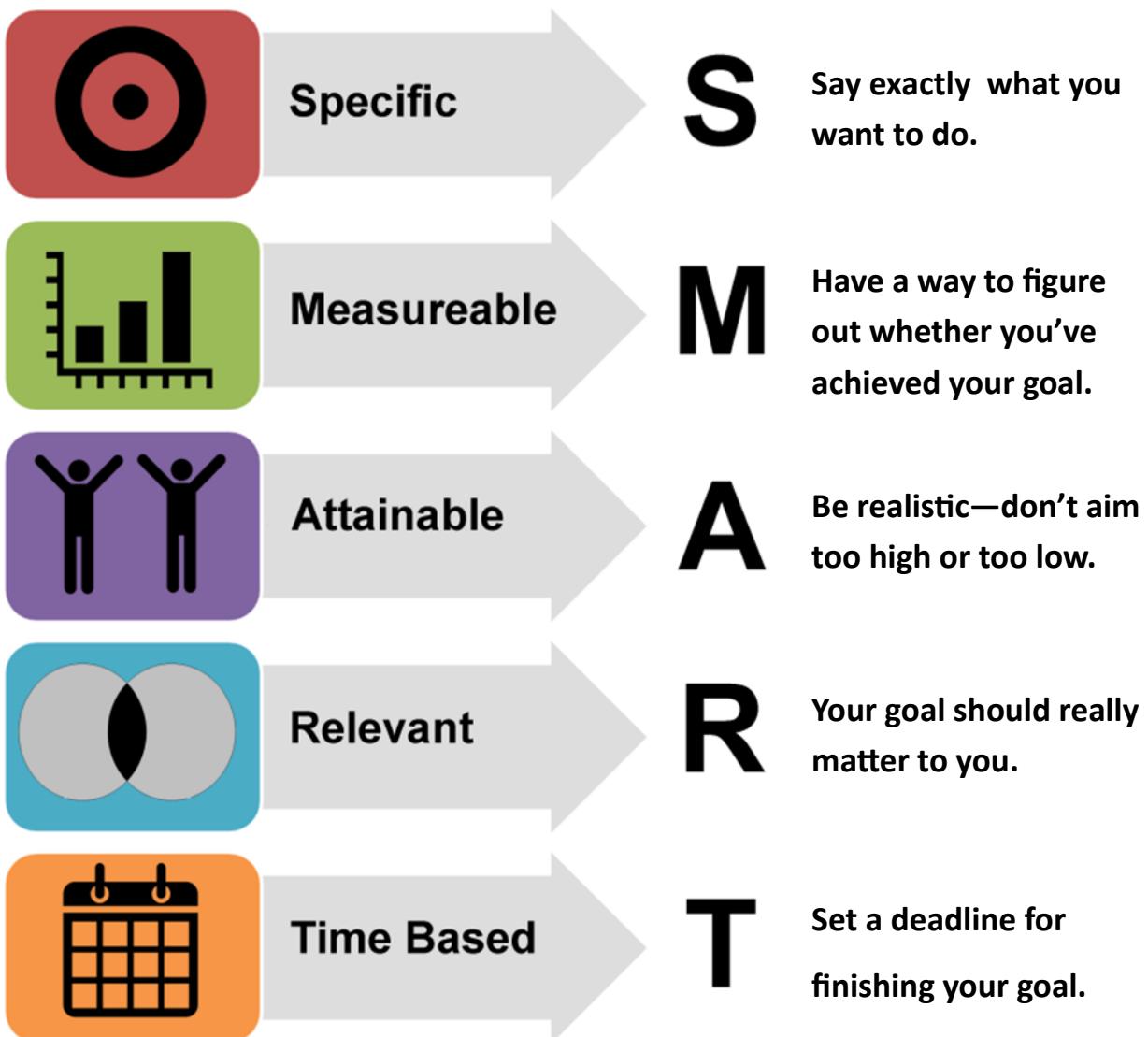
Dave realized his depression was getting in the way of living a life that was meaningful to him. Dave identified the following areas of his life he wants to improve:



1. *I want to become more physically active.*
2. *I want to reconnect with family.*
3. *I want to improve my self-esteem and feel more hopeful about the future.*
4. *I want to eat better and manage my pain.*

Setting Smart Goals

Now that you've selected the areas you want to focus on, you're ready to begin setting some goals. Your goals should be SMART!



Example:

Original Goal

Exercise more

SMART Goal

I will take a 15 minute walk around the neighborhood three mornings a week.

Skill Menu

Work with your provider to select two to three skills that best meet your needs. Here is a list of the skill areas we offer:

Engaging in Activities to Improve Mood

This module focuses on increasing the number of enjoyable or meaningful activities you engage in, as well as reconnecting with the important people in your life. These exercises will help you to feel better about yourself by becoming more active in the things you like to do.



Managing Unhelpful Thoughts

This module was designed to change the way you think about stressful situations. These exercises help you to challenge negative or pessimistic thinking and learn to use more practical and balanced thinking strategies.

Using Relaxation Skills to Manage Stress and Tension

This module teaches you to use skills such as deep breathing and imagery to relax yourself physically and mentally. These skills are particularly helpful for individuals who experience stress or tension.

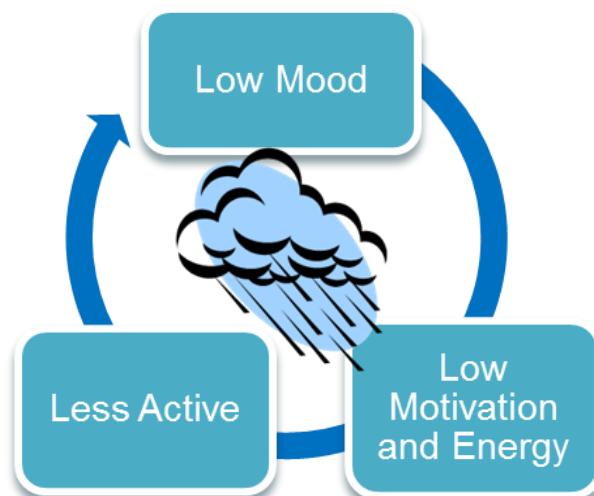


Improving Health and Wellness

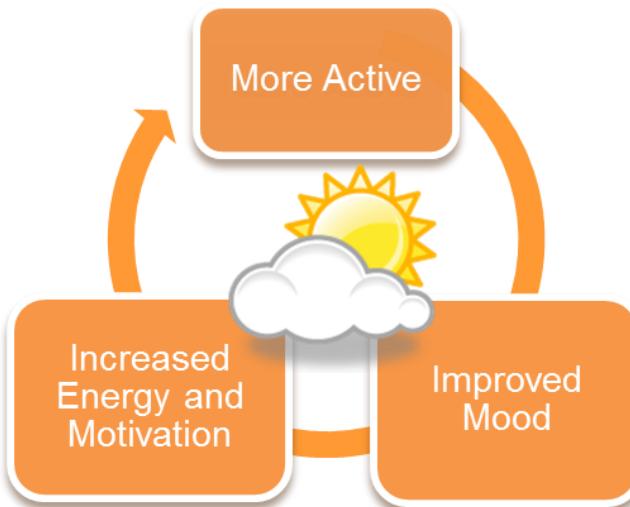
This module introduces skills to help improve areas such as physical activity, eating habits, sleep, and pain. Special attention will be given to when you should contact a medical provider.

Behavior and Mood in Depression

As depression or low mood sets in, you may notice a decrease in your energy and motivation to do the things that are important to you. When this happens, you can get into a habit of avoiding activities that may actually help you feel better.



You can break out of this depressive cycle by choosing to engage in activities that are important to you, even when you don't feel like it. Engaging in enjoyable or meaningful activities on a regular basis will help improve your mood and increase your energy level and motivation to keep moving forward.



Dave's Activities



Let's check in with Dave, the Army Veteran whose low mood got in the way of doing many activities that are important to him.



- *I feel down.*
- *I'm ashamed that I'm unproductive.*
- *I feel alone.*
- *I feel stressed out about finances.*
- *I lack motivation.*
- *I spend a lot of the day in bed or watching TV.*
- *I avoid social activities and talking with friends and family.*
- *I stopped going to church.*
- *I stopped taking care of things around my home.*



Dave's Desired Activities:



- *Reconnect with friends and family*
- *Go to church regularly*
- *Get my house in order*

Dave's SMART Goals:

This week, Dave set two goals to increase the frequency of activities he is already doing:

1. *Play with dog for 10 minutes five days a week.*
2. *Take shower by 10 AM three days this week.*



The following week, Dave added these new goals:

1. *Do a load of dishes on Tuesday.*
2. *Call my daughter on Thursday.*
3. *Go to church on Sunday with neighbor.*

Enjoyable and Meaningful Activities

Each person has his or her own ideas about activities that are important.

Doing what you like: Enjoyable activities

Some activities are fun, help you feel happier, and are more fulfilling.

Examples: Spending time with friends, going to a movie, or fishing.



Getting things done: Meaningful activities

Other activities may not be fun while you are doing them; but once you finish, you feel good about what you have just completed.

Examples: cleaning, exercising, or catching up on paperwork



Taking Action and Next Steps

Do current activities more often.

OR

Restart activities you did in the past.

OR

Try a new activity that interests you.

Engaging in Activities Tip Sheet

Follow your action plan, not your mood.

Engaging in activities, even when you don't feel like it, will help improve your mood. You may be surprised to find yourself enjoying the activity once you get going. Use your action plan to help you stay on track in meeting your goals.



Monitor your progress and problem-solve barriers.



Keeping track of your progress will help you know what's working and what you might need to change. Take note of any obstacles you run into in completing your action plan, and talk with others or problem-solve about how to overcome them. Stay positive and get creative.

Include others.

Consider how you can include a friend or family member in your activities. They may be able to do the activity with you, or they may help hold you accountable and increase your motivation to follow through on your action plan.



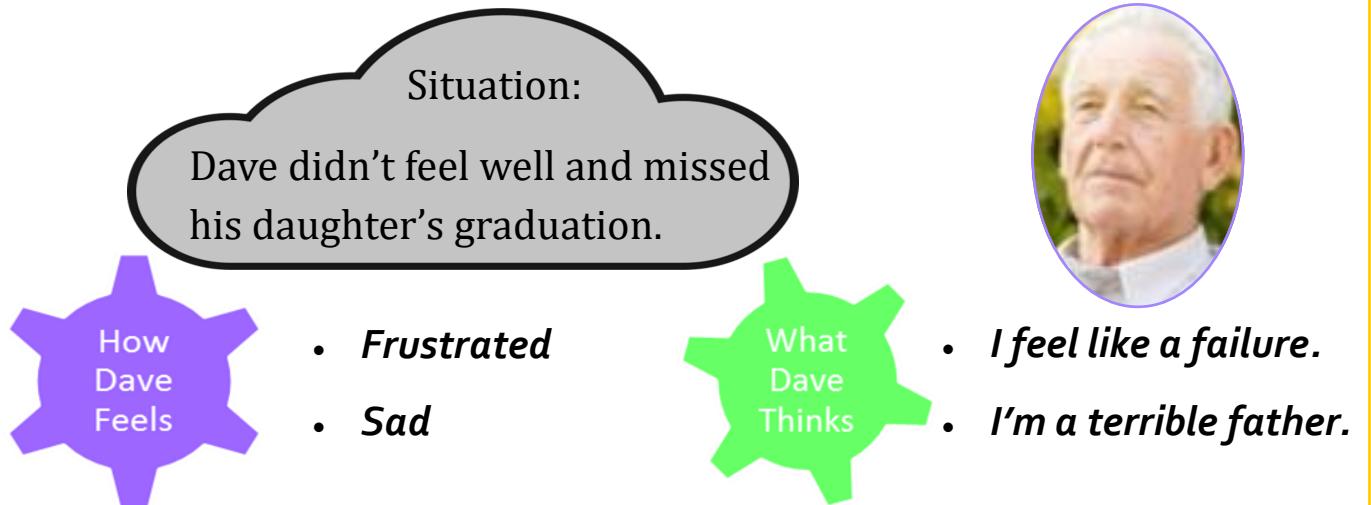
Be patient and acknowledge success.



Adding activities back into your life gets easier as it becomes part of your regular routine. Each step you take toward meeting your goals is important, so be sure to acknowledge your accomplishments! Early success can build your confidence and increase your motivation to keep moving forward.

Feelings vs. Thoughts

Dave's feelings and thoughts



What are feelings?

- Feelings (also known as emotions) are core human experiences.
- Feelings are best described with one word (sad, worried, happy, satisfied, scared, etc.). *Note: In the example above – the sentence “I feel like a failure” is a thought, not a feeling.*
- Examples of feelings (emotions) include the following:



What are thoughts?

- Thoughts are the things we tell ourselves about an experience.
- They typically involve phrases or full sentences.
- Sometimes thoughts become so automatic that they are not always easy to recognize.

Unhelpful vs. Helpful Thinking

Our thoughts have a great impact on how we feel. Thoughts can be helpful, unhelpful, or something in between.

Unhelpful Thinking

This type of thinking is an interpretation of a situation that is unnecessarily negative and ultimately not helpful. Unhelpful thought patterns can include over-reacting to a situation, exaggerating the negatives, or focusing too much on things that you have no control over.

Example #1: Unhelpful Thinking Pattern

<u>Situation / Experience</u>	<u>Thoughts</u>	<u>Feelings</u>
Busy day at work; a lot of pressure to finish a project that isn't going well.	"I am doing a terrible job today."	Stress Sadness

Helpful Thinking

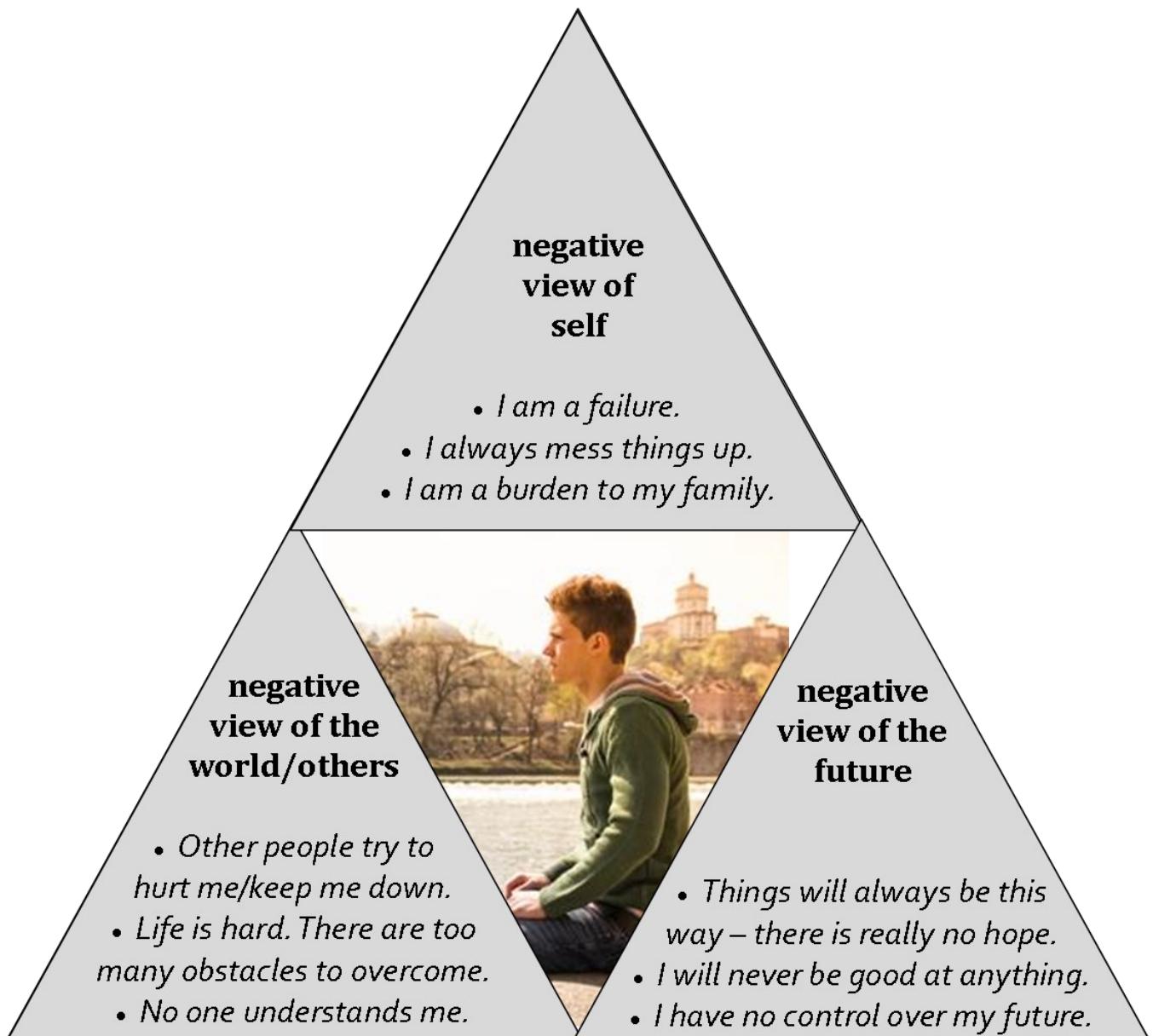
This type of thinking is not always positive or “sunny” but is at least accurate and realistic. Helpful thinking means that you are thinking about situations and reacting in a way that is in your best interest.

Example #2: Helpful Thinking Pattern

<u>Situation / Experience</u>	<u>Thoughts</u>	<u>Feelings</u>
Busy day at work; a lot of pressure to finish a project that isn't going well.	"This is a stressful day, but I have handled stress before."	Stressed Capable/Confident

Common Unhelpful Thinking Patterns when Depressed

Individuals with depression often have negative (unhelpful) thoughts related to their views about: The Self, The Future, The World.



Do you recognize any of these negative thought patterns in your own life?

Dave's Thought Worksheet

First let's take a look at how Dave's unhelpful thoughts impacted his mood and behaviors. Then, notice how Dave used helpful thinking strategies to improve his mood.



Original thoughts	
Situation 	<i>Sitting at home watching TV during the middle of the day</i>
Thoughts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I am truly useless now. (negative view of self)</i> <i>This is pathetic – I am wasting my life away. (negative view of future)</i> <i>There is no one helping me and it seems that no one cares. (negative view about others)</i>
Feelings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Depressed</i> <i>Mad / angry</i> <i>Lethargic / without energy</i>
Behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Stay on the couch – no motivation to get going</i> <i>Isolate from others</i>
New thoughts	
New / Alternative Thought 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Nothing is going to change until I make a change.</i> <i>I will not stand by and waste my life. I insist on taking action.</i> <i>My family is supportive, maybe they just don't know how to help.</i>
New Feelings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Determined</i> <i>Hopeful</i> <i>Motivated</i>

Using Coping Statements to Manage Unhelpful Thoughts

What are Coping Statements?

A coping statement is a statement you make to yourself to help decrease feelings of stress and depression. It is a way to provide "instructions" to yourself to reduce how much negative thoughts get in the way.

Coping statements can serve as "alternative thoughts" when unhelpful thinking patterns are getting you down. Remember, coping statements are not "pie-in-the-sky" statements but, rather, should be statements that you actually believe to be true.

Example Coping Statements:

- "I can do what I need to do."
- "Even if I make mistakes, it will be okay."
- "If I take it one step at a time, I can meet this challenge."
- "I can take control of my stress by getting up and doing things."
- "I choose to think positively and to remember the things I can still do."
- "I am not going to let my pain limit my life."
- "I have people in my life who care about me."
- "I can ask for help when I need it."



My Coping Statements

Coping Statements I Can Use:

Stressful Situation	Coping Statement(s)
1.	
2.	
3.	

Tips for Using Coping Statements:



- Don't be afraid to talk to yourself! Say coping statements aloud to yourself instead of just reading them.



- It can sometimes be helpful to audio record the statements and listen to them when necessary.



- Place your coping statements where you will see them regularly (a note on your refrigerator, on your phone, etc.).

Evaluating Unhelpful Thoughts

You previously learned how to identify unhelpful thoughts and use coping statements to decrease stress and depression. However, it can also be useful to challenge these unhelpful thoughts in a more direct way.

How to Evaluate your Thoughts:

1. EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE

Think like a scientist—look for evidence for and against a specific thought to evaluate how realistic it is. Approach your thoughts as if they are scientific hypotheses (or guesses), rather than facts. Often, we focus on one explanation or interpretation of a situation, rather than looking at the whole picture and considering other possible interpretations. In depression, people tend to focus only on the negative aspects of a situation rather than examining all the evidence and taking a balanced perspective.

Inspect the evidence *for* the thought.

- What has happened to suggest the thought is true?

Inspect the evidence *against* the thought.

- What has happened to suggest the thought is not true?

TIP: Ask yourself these questions:

- Is this thought based on feelings or facts?
- Am I 100% certain this thought is true? If not, why not?
- Is there another possible explanation or interpretation of the situation?

What counts as evidence?

- Specific behaviors or actions
- Past experiences
- Feedback from others

What doesn't count as evidence?

- Feelings
- Interpretations of events
- Interpretations of others' actions



2. IDENTIFY ALTERNATIVE THOUGHTS.

The next step is to come up with an alternative, more balanced way of thinking about the situation. Remember, we tend to assume that the first thought that comes into our head is the “truth,” so it’s important to open your mind to ALL other possibilities.

One way to generate alternative thoughts is to ask yourself, “*What would I tell someone I loved if he/she were in this situation and had these thoughts?*”

Evaluating Dave's Unhelpful Thoughts

Let's take a look at how Dave used a scientific approach to evaluate his unhelpful thoughts in a more direct way.



Original Thoughts	
Situation <i>What actually happened? Where? When? How?</i>	<i>My friend cancelled on me at the last minute.</i>
Thoughts <i>What thoughts went through your mind? What views did you have about yourself, your future, or others?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>She must be sick of me.</i> <i>I'm a failure at relationships — no one wants to spend time with me.</i>
Feelings <i>What emotions did you feel at the time?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Sad</i> <i>Lonely</i> <i>Worthless</i>
Behaviors <i>What did you do in response? Also include any withdrawal of activities – like staying at home or staying in bed.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Stayed at home by myself all day</i> <i>Watched boring daytime TV</i>
Evidence	
Evidence to support the thought <i>What has happened to make you believe this thought is true?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>She cancelled our plans.</i>
Evidence that does not support the thought <i>What has happened to prove the thought is NOT true?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>She said she had to care for her sick granddaughter.</i> <i>We have spent a lot of good time together recently .</i>
New Thoughts	
New/alternative thought <i>What is another, more helpful, way to think about this situation?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>This time didn't work out to get together, but we can make plans in the near future.</i>
New feelings <i>What emotions did you feel after identifying the new/balanced thought?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Hopeful</i> <i>Comforted</i>

Stress & Tension in Your Life

We all experience stress and tension at times. This is an important and natural response to the demands in our lives. If we didn't feel stress or tension, then we would not feel motivated to deal with these demands.

Most of us like some challenges! However, too much stress can cause problems and impact our health and well-being.

You may experience stress and tension in a number of ways. Check any of these signs that look familiar to you.

Common sensations of stress and tension

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Muscle tension | <input type="checkbox"/> Heart pounding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty concentrating | <input type="checkbox"/> Irritability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feelings of worry or fear | <input type="checkbox"/> Sweaty palms |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking the worst might happen | <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue |

What are sources of stress and tension in your life?

How has this impacted your life?

Taking Control with Relaxation Skills

The purpose of relaxation exercises is for you to gain skills to guide your mind and body away from stress and tension and into a more relaxed state.



Relaxation and tension are incompatible states that cannot occur together.

If you are relaxed, then you are not tense. If you are tense, then you are not relaxed.

Here are two simple, effective skills to help you gain control over your stress and tension.



Deep Breathing

- Learn how to breathe optimally for oxygen “transfer” to reduce bodily tension and lower your heartbeat.

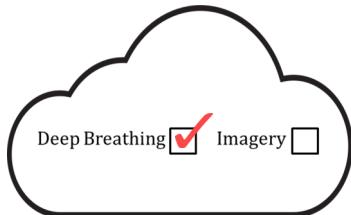


Imagery

- Learn to use vivid, soothing mental imagery to focus your attention away from unhelpful thoughts and feelings.

Which skill would be the most helpful to you?

How Dave Uses Deep Breathing



Dave starts feeling anxious while waiting in line at the bank. He needs to talk to the teller about his overdrawn account balance and see if he can reverse some incorrect charges.



- **Worried.**
- **Feels tightness in his stomach.**
- **Feels stressed out about finances.**



- **Snaps at the teller when he gets to the counter, because he feels so stressed out.**
- **Sometimes he leaves the line altogether to avoid talking to the teller.**



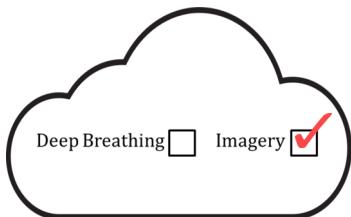
- **"I am going up to the teller, and she'll tell me there is no money in my account."**
- **"The teller is going to think I am a low-life."**
- **"I have no control over my finances."**

Dave uses his deep breathing skills from the session:



1. Dave realizes his breathing is “portable;” therefore, he can practice it in line or anywhere else he starts feeling stressed.
2. By focusing on his breath, Dave stops thinking about his anxious thoughts, and his stomach tightness loosens. He is able to remain waiting in line.
3. By the time Dave gets to the teller, he feels more in control and is able to explain his situation calmly to the bank teller.

How Dave Uses Imagery



Dave wakes up, and the first thing he notices that morning is his chronic pain.



- *Low mood.*
- *Frustrated.*
- *Preoccupied with his pain.*



- *Avoids physical activity when he is in pain.*
- *Stays in bed and watches TV to try and distract himself.*



- *"I am in too much pain to do anything productive."*
- *"I have no control over my pain—It is taking over my life."*

Dave decides to use his imagery skills from the session:

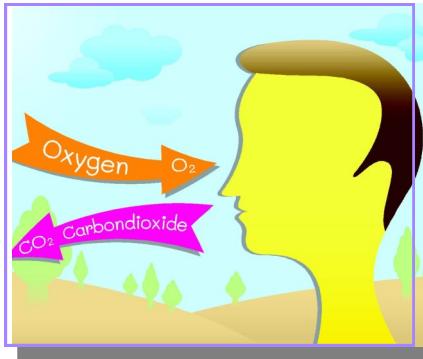


1. The imagery exercise helps him relax and distracts him from his pain.
Dave has noticed that when his stress decreases, his muscles relax, and his pain often decreases
2. This exercise helps him shift his way of thinking.
He realizes he could make some positive changes to manage some of his pain.
3. Dave finds that, with regular practice, this technique improves his overall sense of well-being.

Using Deep Breathing to Reduce Stress & Tension

Why is deep breathing used?

There needs to be a balance between oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood for the body to run efficiently. This balance is maintained through how fast and how deeply we breathe.



Rapid and shallow breathing disrupts the oxygen-carbon dioxide balance and can cause many of the physical sensations that accompany stress and tension.

One thing that can help is deep breathing.

- Changing the rate and way you breathe can make your entire body feel more relaxed and function more effectively.
- Taking a deep, full breath can produce a feeling of calmness and relaxation by increasing your oxygen-rich blood flow.
- Deep breathing can help you start to form good habits for reacting to stressful situations.



How to Practice Deep Breathing

Take notice of your breathing. Is your chest or stomach moving? You most likely breathe more from the **chest** than the stomach. We want to teach you to breathe more with your **stomach** and diaphragm rather than your chest.

How to Deep Breathe:

1. Place one hand on your abdomen, with your little finger about one inch above your navel, and place the other hand on your chest. If you are lying down, you can place a book on your stomach instead of your hands.
2. **Inhale “into your stomach,”** through your nose, pausing naturally before exhaling. You should see the hand or book on your stomach move more than your chest.
3. **Exhale** gradually through your lips, by tightening your stomach muscles and pausing naturally before inhaling again.
4. Take slow, even, deep breaths. Breathe in and out at a comfortable rate. Do not pause at the top of each breath.



Other Resources

You can view an animated video demonstrating how to perform deep breathing at this web address:

<https://youtu.be/YdsipKCACac>

Instructions for Practice Exercises

Changing your experience of stress is like learning a new skill - *it gets easier with practice!*

- Practice regularly. Try three five-minute sessions a day.
- Once you are comfortable with deep breathing, try the following:
 1. Inhale at a normal speed.
 2. Exhale for four seconds.
 3. Pause for four seconds, then repeat.
- Focus on the count during your exhalations, and pause before inhaling again. This will activate your body's relaxation response!
- Start by practicing only in non-stressful situations. Once you feel comfortable with it, you can use deep breathing in stressful situations.
- Increase awareness of stress! Identify stressful situations and write down feelings, physical signs, thoughts, and behaviors associated with those situations. This will help you be aware of when you can use deep breathing skills to help relax.
- Deep breathing can be done anytime, such as while sitting in traffic or waiting in line at the grocery store.



Using Imagery to Reduce Stress & Tension

What is imagery?

Imagery is a simple process that uses your imagination to communicate with your body. To your body, images and experiences created in your mind can be as real as actual events. Your body will react as though the experience is happening. It seems the body may not know the difference between an actual event and a thought!

Why is imagery used?

You can take advantage of this by using your imagination to visualize pleasant experiences. Using imagery this way can ease stress and promote an overall sense of well-being.

Think about times when you have daydreamed. We have all daydreamed about pleasant things that made us feel better.

Of course, the opposite is also true! The difference is that daydreaming usually happens “on accident.” Imagery is used on purpose with a specific goal in mind; to feel better!

Imagery, therefore, can be a powerful tool when used correctly.



How To Practice Using Imagery

1. Find a quiet space where you can either sit or lie down.
2. Start with a quick check-in on what you are thinking and how you feel in your body.
3. Practice deep breathing for a few minutes if you wish (see deep breathing instructions).
4. Imagine going to a place where you feel safe, peaceful, and calm. This place can be a real place or somewhere you invent yourself.
5. Take some time to develop the image of this place in your mind so you can fully experience all of the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures.
6. Practice relaxing as you use all of your senses, and imagine being in this special place.

Example:

Imagine a glass of lemonade. The glass feels icy and cold; visualize the color of the lemonade, think of the fresh citrus smell, think of how it *tastes*.

You probably are salivating thinking of this juice, aren't you?

Try to create a pleasant, positive image that fits your preferences and has meaning to you.



A Generic Example:

Find a comfortable position, either sitting comfortably in a chair or lying down. Close your eyes and take several long, deep breaths.

Once your whole body feels relaxed, travel to your favorite place... it can be any time period or any place. This place is calm and safe... there are no worries here.... Look around this place. What do you see? Do you hear the sounds around you? What are some of the sounds you hear in this place you are imagining? How does this special place smell? Walk around a little and take in all of the wonderful sights.... Feel the air around you and relax.... The air is fresh and it's easy to breathe here. Pay attention to how your body feels.... say to yourself, "I am totally relaxed... without worries... all of the tension has drained away from my body." Take a moment to fully experience your favorite place. Notice the sounds, sights, and smells, and how it feels to be in this very special place. Remember that you can visit this place as often as you want and that it is wonderful. Say to yourself, "I am relaxed here... this place is special and makes me feel at peace."

When you are done with your visit to this special place, open your eyes, and stay in your comfortable position. Continue to breathe smoothly, in a relaxed and rhythmic fashion. Take as long as you want to enjoy and relax. You feel at ease knowing your special place is always available to you and you find that you feel relaxed, even after you leave.



Beach Example

Imagine yourself walking down a sandy beach. The sand is white and warm between your toes. You are looking out over the calm, blue water. The waves are gently lapping at the shore. You feel the pleasant warmth of the sun on your skin... it's a perfectly comfortable temperature outside. Breathe in deeply. There is a gentle breeze, and the sun is shining. Big, cotton-like clouds drift by as you hear sea gulls in the distance. You taste traces of salt on your lips. You are completely relaxed... there are no worries on this beach. There is nothing to distract you from feeling tranquil. Worries drift away. Notice the sounds, the sights, the smells, and how it feels to be in this very special place.

Feel the sand under your feet... you decide to stretch out on the warm, fine, white sand... breathe deeply... feel the warm air. Your body is completely relaxed and you have an overall feeling of warmth and comfort. You look up at the clouds passing by slowly across the beautiful blue sky. You are feeling rejuvenated and completely at peace. Remember that you can visit this place as often as you want and that it is wonderful. Say to yourself, "I am relaxed here... this place is special and makes me feel peaceful and content."



When you are done with your visit, open your eyes and stay in your comfortable position. Continue to breathe smoothly, in a relaxed and rhythmic fashion, and take as long as you want to enjoy and relax. You feel at ease knowing your special place is always available to you and you find that you feel relaxed, even after you leave.

Meadows Example

Imagine yourself walking through a lovely meadow. The breeze feels pleasant against your skin. You are looking out over the calm, beautiful green grass. The blades of grass are gently swaying in the breeze. You feel the pleasant warmth of the sun on your skin... it's a perfectly comfortable temperature outside. Breathe in deeply. There is a gentle breeze, and the sun is shining. Big, cotton-like clouds drift by as you hear birds in the distance. You hear the wind blow gently through the trees. You taste the sweet summer air on your lips. You are completely relaxed... there are no worries in this meadow. There is nothing to distract you from feeling tranquil. Worries drift away. Notice the sounds, sights, and smells, and how it feels to be in this very special place.



Feel the cool grass under your feet... you decide to stretch out on the soft, cushiony grass... breathe deeply... feel the air enter your lungs slowly and deeply. Your body is completely relaxed, and you have an overall feeling of warmth and comfort. You look up at the clouds passing by slowly across the beautiful blue sky. You are feeling rejuvenated and completely at peace. Remember that you can visit this place as often as you want and that it is wonderful. Say to yourself, "I am relaxed here... this place is special and makes me feel peaceful and content."

When you are done with your visit, open your eyes and stay in your comfortable position. Continue to breathe smoothly, in a relaxed and rhythmic fashion; take as long as you want to enjoy and relax. You feel at ease knowing your special place is always available to you; and you find that you feel relaxed, even after you leave.

Instructions for Practice Exercises

- Changing your experience of stress is like learning a new skill - it gets easier with practice!
- Practice makes perfect! Make sure you find several times a day to apply this technique. Practice for 10-15 minutes at a time in non-stressful situations. Once you feel comfortable with it, then you can use imagery in stressful situations.
- When ready to practice, choose a comfortable position, close your eyes, and give yourself permission to relax.
- Some people find using imagery before going to bed and first thing in the morning to be helpful.
- Remember, when using imagery, to use a scene that incorporates all of your senses and make it as elaborate and realistic as you can.
- You will find that, after practice, imagery will become a powerful tool to help you feel better.



Additional Resources

Deep Breathing Mobile App

Breathe2Relax:

Below is a link to a free guided-deep breathing app called “Breathe2Relax.” This app will adjust to your particular breathing pattern, and then gradually train you to take slower, deeper breaths. Practice and get comfortable with the basic deep breathing technique first. Then, you can use Breathe2Relax to maximize your results:

<http://t2health.dcoe.mil/apps/breathe2relax>

If you would like more information on how to use Breathe2Relax, please view the following instructional video:

<https://youtu.be/AEZ1dvZuJYc>

Physical Health

Healthy Eating

Improve your health through diet/eating changes.

- Lose weight.
- Eat healthier foods like fruits and vegetables.
- Improve your eating habits by creating an eating plan and avoiding unhealthy fast food options.



Physical Activity/ Exercise



Increase your activity level to improve your health.

- Find activities that you enjoy.
- Start an exercise plan that works for you.
- Increasing activity can be difficult—this skill topic will help you find solutions to barriers and support you in your exercise plan.

Improving Sleep

Get a better night's sleep and feel more rested.

- Introduce sleep habits to improve sleep quality.
- Start a sleep schedule and routine.
- Reduce stress to help you more quickly fall and stay asleep.



Overcoming Pain



Take action to reduce the impact of pain on your life.

- Explore skills to help you shift your focus away from your pain.
- Learn relaxation strategies to reduce muscle tension, which often makes pain worse.
- Start a pain management plan that fits your needs.

Dave & Pain



Dave has been in constant pain because of his back injury and has not been able to work because of this disability.



- *Frustrated*
- *Down*
- *Unmotivated*
- *Unproductive*
- *Tired*
- *Stressed out about finances*



- *I usually oversleep or just stay in bed after I wake up.*
- *I spend a lot of the day watching TV.*
- *I haven't cleaned up my house in ages; it really needs it.*



- *My pain controls everything in my life.*
- *There is nothing more I can do to control my pain.*
- *Pain is the reason my life is the way it is.*
- *I can't go back and change anything.*

Dave used the *Pain Tip Sheet* to create a three-pronged approach:



1. Set a plan to become more physically active.

I'll walk at least three times a day for at least 20 min. each.

2. Shift the way he thinks about his pain.

I can make positive changes to control some of my pain and get my life back on track.

3. Use deep breathing.

It will be great if I can stop and relax when I notice that I am tensing up.

Dave & Healthy Eating



Dave has gained 25 pounds over the past year.



- *Embarrassed*
- *Ashamed*
- *Overwhelmed and unsure about how to lose weight.*



- *I never have anything good at home, so I just eat fast food.*
- *I just don't do much physically; my back bothers me, and I get out of breath easily.*
- *I don't get out much, either to see friends or to just go shopping and things like that.*



- *I have let myself go and now I look terrible.*
- *I have no idea how to fix my eating behaviors—I just feel like giving up.*

Dave decided to use the *Healthy Eating Tip Sheet*:



1. Improve nutrition

I'll go shopping this week and buy what I need to have two healthy meals at home this week.

2. Plan for success

I'll start keeping track of what I eat; if I get on a regular routine, I probably won't snack as much.

Dave knows these are only the first steps, but he wants to start small so he can start seeing improvement without feeling overwhelmed. He can add to his plan over time.

Healthy Eating Tips:

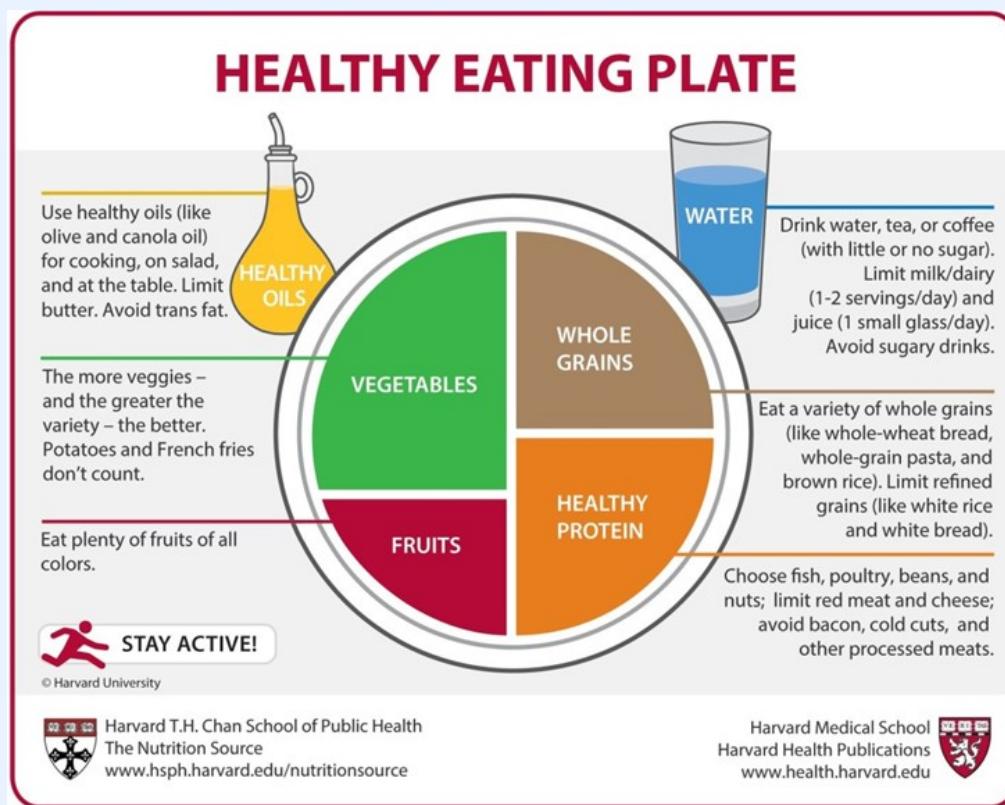
When you eat healthy foods, you are much more likely to feel better—both physically and emotionally. Remember that YOU have the ability to improve the way you feel by taking action. Below are some simple healthy eating tips to help guide your next steps.

Ways to Improve Nutrition:

- Work to set healthy eating goals and action plans to reach your goals.
- Start an eating routine and eat every day at those times. Avoid unnecessary snacking.
- Pay attention to what you are eating and read food labels.
- Eat when you are hungry, not when you are bored, sad or worried.
- Control portion size (next page).
- Eat the rainbow! More fruits and vegetables help to control sugars and reduce unhealthy fats.
- Use the Healthy Eating Plate to guide your eating plan. (See below)

Planning for Success:

- Find healthy recipes you like.
- Identify an eating plan that works for you—one you are excited about
- Get a healthy eating buddy
- Plan ahead (for example, make a grocery list before shopping). Keep healthy snacks on hand.
- Every little bit counts. Avoid feeling frustrated by “setbacks.”
- Track your progress—give yourself credit for even small changes. Celebrate when you reach your goals!
- Consult your primary care provider for more in-depth nutrition guidance.

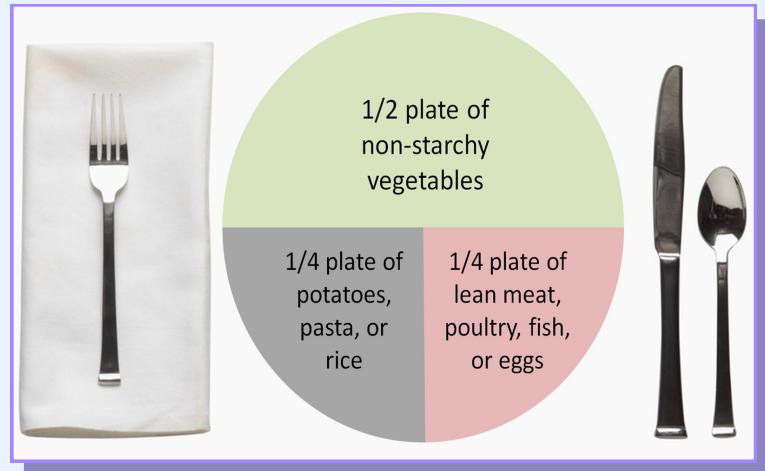


Portion Control

This method is an easy way to think of how many portions to eat without having to measure servings.

Steps:

1. Place the food on your plate in the correct section.
2. Eat your food clockwise, starting with the vegetables
3. Eat one full plateful before refilling.



4. If you have finished and are still hungry, wait five minutes, and then refill and eat the vegetable portion first.
5. Wait five more minutes. If you are still hungry, eat potatoes, rice, or pasta.
6. Wait five more minutes. If you are still hungry, eat meat.

Tips:

- Drink water before, during, and after meals. This helps you control your appetite and digest your food better.
- Slow down while eating. Try to make one plate last about 20 minutes.
- Restaurants use larger plates and serve larger portions than needed. Ask for a to-go box and put half of your meal away at the start. This gives you a healthier portion size and saves you money because you now have meal for later.

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Exercise Tips:

Your activity level is closely related to how you feel physically and emotionally. Below are some simple tips to help you be more physically active and to enjoy the activities you do. Enjoying exercise is a key to being able to stick with it.

Ways to increase activity:

- Set goals and track your progress. When you reach a goal, reward yourself!
- It's okay to have small chunks of exercise throughout the day. Three 10-minute walks are just as good as one 30-minute walk.
- Every little bit counts. Try taking the stairs or parking further away on purpose to build exercise into your daily routine.
- Don't overdo it. Create reasonable but important goals.
- Exercise in the morning if possible. Morning exercise will likely increase your alertness and energy levels later in the day. Avoid exercise two to three hours before bed.
- Consult with your primary care provider to develop an exercise plan that fits your needs.

Making exercise fun—Ways to increase enjoyment of activities:

- Find an activity you enjoy.
- Find an exercise buddy (person or pet), listen to music or audio book, relax with your thoughts and reflect on the things that are important to you.
- Let loose—being active is about having fun.



Sleep Tips:

Sleep is critically important to your health and how you feel. Positive changes to your sleep habits can dramatically improve how you feel. The following tips are designed to improve your sleep habits and behaviors.

Ways to improve your sleep cycle:

- **Set a sleep management goal and action plan.** Track your progress to see what works best for you.
- **Track your sleep.** Use the sleep monitoring worksheet to learn about your sleep patterns.
- **Set a sleep schedule.** Help your body get into a regular sleep cycle by going to bed and getting up at the same time each day.
- **Develop a relaxing bedtime routine.** Doing the same bedtime routine each night cues your body that it's time to sleep. Take a hot bath, stretch your muscles, or use a relaxation skill like deep breathing or imagery to help your body relax before bed.
- **Bed is for sleep.** Limiting the use of the bed to sleep and sex helps train your body to think about your bed as a place to sleep. Activities such as reading, eating, using the computer, and watching TV should be done in another room.
- **Get up after 20 minutes.** If you can't fall asleep after 20 minutes, get out of bed and do a calming activity until you feel sleepy. Then go back to bed and try again.
- **Limit naps.** Sleeping during the day can make it harder to sleep at night. Avoid taking naps, or limit your naps to one hour or less. Especially avoid naps later in the day.
- **Limit screen time one hour before bed.** The light from electronic devices stimulates brain activity, making it harder to fall asleep.
- **Exercise in the morning or early afternoon.** Exercising during these times helps you stay alert during the day and can improve the quality of your sleep at night.
- **Get comfortable.** Make your bed and bedroom are as quiet, dark, and comfortable as possible. Keep the temperature cool, and use curtains or a sleep mask to block out lights.
- **Avoid caffeine and nicotine in the afternoon.** Stimulants make it harder to fall asleep.
- **Avoid alcohol.** Alcohol disrupts the quality of sleep, causing you to feel less rested.
- **Consult your primary care provider.** Talk with your medical provider if you have breathing or other medical concerns that interfere with your sleep.



Pain Tips:

Pain is influenced by many factors, including physical health conditions and the environment, as well as the things we think, feel, and do. Without a doubt—pain can be a huge interference. Finding ways to reduce the impact of pain on your life is very important. Remember, there are likely things you can do to help. Below are a few simple tips to guide your efforts.

Actions you can take to decrease your pain...

- **Set a pain-management goal.** Track your progress to see what works best for you.
- **Talk with others who have experienced pain.** Sharing your experiences gives you a chance to connect with others as well as to learn new ways to cope with your pain.
- **Increase exercise.** Exercise stimulates the release of natural endorphins and often reduces stress, increases muscle strength, and improves mobility.
- **Shift your focus.** When you focus on pain, it makes it worse. Instead, find something you enjoy doing, such as watching a movie, reading a book, going for a walk, talking to a friend.
- **Practice relaxation skills.** Deep breathing or mental imagery can help decrease stress and tension.
- **Talk to your primary care provider.** Communicate concerns and listen for options.



Other ways to improve pain management:

- Monitor your pain – keeping track of your pain will help you identify factors that make it better or worse.
- Be aware of body positions that exacerbate your pain – standing too long, or not moving around enough might play a role.
- Develop skills to cope with negative feelings that can exacerbate pain (like sadness, stress, and anger)
- Focus your thoughts away from your pain and get engaged with the people and activities that you value.



Additional Resources

Physical Activity / Exercise

The President's Council on Fitness, Sports, & Nutrition:

<http://www.fitness.gov/>

Free website for tracking exercise and diet:

<https://www.myfitnesspal.com/>

Improving Sleep

More information on healthy sleep habits:

<http://sleep.org>

http://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/index.html

Helpful Mobil App:

CBT-i Coach for iPhone and Android

Reducing Pain

List of organizations that provide free information on chronic pain:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002164.htm>

Maintaining Improvement

Tips for Maintaining Improvement:

- Continue using your skills to maintain a high quality of life.
- Remain socially connected—be it in your faith community, social groups, the VA, or with friends and family.
- Tell someone close to you about your progress in this program and any ongoing goals. That way, you have accountability and support.
- Remember to set reasonable goals to avoid feeling let down or frustrated. Small steps are more likely to lead to accomplishment and positive feelings. Don't forget your SMART goals!
- Track your progress. When you reach a goal, recognize your effort!

Bumps in the Road:

Despite our best intentions, things happen! We expect that people might hit bumps in the road. When you do, be kind to yourself and remember:

- Anticipating and addressing barriers to your goals will help you continue benefiting from this program long after your last session.
- Think about the bumps in the road you've encountered in the past—how did you get past them?
- What skills can you use to continue reaching your goals?
- Be flexible with new situations. When stressors occur, think about how you can use your toolbox in a different way.



Next Steps

What are your goals moving forward?

What steps can you take to achieve your goals?

Who can help you move forward?

What might stand in the way?

How do you plan to overcome these obstacles?



Additional Help

Signs you should seek additional help:

Options for seeking additional help:

Sometimes, despite attempts to use the skills you learned in this program, you may need additional help. If you notice symptoms of depression returning or worsening, remember that you can contact your VA primary care provider and/or your mental health care provider to get back into care.

If things are getting to the point of a crisis and you need immediate help, contact the **Veterans' Crisis Line**:

- Phone: 1-800-273-8255 (press 1)
- Send text to 838255
- Website: www.veteranscrisisline.net
- Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year