



Self-Care and Positively Coping with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

You may currently be undergoing treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This may mean you are seeing a therapist on a regular basis. Your health care provider or psychiatrist may prescribe medication as part of your treatment, in addition to completing other therapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy and perhaps other complimentary therapies. Practicing good self-care is an important part of the healing process. Just as each person's recovery pathway is unique, each individual's approach to self-care can be different. Replenishing your body and mind through self-care enhances your ability to positively cope with PTSD. Good self-care includes navigating the daily challenges you face in a healthful way. The following are self-care and coping strategies that have been used successfully by others. You may consider using them in your daily life to help promote healing and enhance your treatment.

Physical Self-Care

Taking care of your body is important. You may be recovering from or managing a wound, illness, or injury in addition to PTSD. Your physical health contributes to your overall psychological and emotional well-being and helps reduce the effects of stress on your body.

- **Exercise or engage in physical activity.** This can be different for each person and can be tailored to meet your lifestyle needs. Consult your health care provider before taking on a new exercise plan. For more information, visit [Active Living for Wounded, Ill, and Injured \(WII\)](#).
- **Follow your health care provider's instructions.** This includes taking medication as prescribed and following any directions regarding your diet or exercise. Be aware that many medications can interact with alcohol, so be sure to check with your health care provider.
- **Prioritize sleep and implement good sleep habits** such as creating a dark, cool, and comfortable sleep environment and avoiding alcohol and caffeine prior to sleep. Seek professional assistance if you are continually having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep. For more information, visit [Sleep for WII](#).
- **Eat healthful food.** You may find that you are not hungry at all or that you are very hungry. This could be a side effect of treatment or medications or a symptom of a health challenge you are facing. Be sure to consult your health care provider if you are having any appetite issues. For more information, visit [Healthy Eating for WII](#).



- **Avoid or reduce those behaviors that can contribute to poor health, including tobacco use.** You may need assistance quitting tobacco. For more information visit [Tobacco Free Living for WII](#).

Psychological and Emotional Self-Care

Taking care of your psychological and emotional needs is just as important as taking care of your physical health and is essential during your PTSD treatment.

- **Seek help and accept help when you need it.** None of us can handle everything on our own. Learning to recognize when you are in need of assistance allows you to seek help early before problems seem like they are no longer manageable.
- **Talk to someone you trust about your treatment.** This might be a family member, a friend, or a chaplain. Letting someone else know that you are in treatment will give them the opportunity to encourage you and provide support.
- **Learn to self-soothe.** Use relaxation techniques and breathing exercises to help calm you when you are feeling overwhelmed. Visit the [Relax Relax Toolkit](#) for useful relaxation exercises.
- **Take time to be alone and take quiet time when you need it, but avoid isolating yourself from others.** Make it a point to socialize with others even if you start out little by little. Avoid those individuals who encourage negative coping.
- **Don't take on too much at once.** Focusing on your recovery and healing process is important.
- **Follow your health care provider's instructions** including taking medications as prescribed.
- **Recognize when you are negatively coping with your emotions or symptoms** such as using alcohol or misusing medications. Try to implement positive coping strategies and reach out for social or professional help if you need it. Reaching out for help when you need it is good and necessary.

Social Self-Care

Your friends, family, and peers are the people who know you best. Building a support network of people you trust is important during your treatment. It can help provide strength through difficult times and will contribute to your healing.

- **Establish a social network of family and friends** who you trust, and make it point to interact with them regularly.



- **Consider joining a peer support group** for those individuals who have experienced events similar to yours and who are also being treated for PTSD. You may find that you find strength and hope both by listening talking to others who have been through similar situations.

Spiritual Self-Care

Spiritual self-care can help you establish purpose and meaning in your life and create a sense of balance. Spiritual support can also provide stability and hope during the healing process. Whether you practice an organized religion and belong to a larger religious community, or look to embrace the idea of mindfulness (staying focused on the present moment in time), spiritual self-care can contribute positively to your overall well-being.

- Pray
- Meditate
- Volunteer
- Connect with nature

Additional Resources

- HPW WII Homepage: www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/wounded-ill-and-injured/Pages/health-promotion.aspx
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD: www.ptsd.va.gov
- Real Warriors Campaign: www.realwarriors.net/taxonomy/term/33
- After Deployment: <http://afterdeployment.dcoe.mil/topics-post-traumatic-stress>
- inTransition: <http://intransition.dcoe.mil/>

Family members, friends, and fellow shipmates and Marines know each other best and are in a position to notice changes of behavior in a person that indicate they are in crisis. Health care providers and any other individual in contact with a Sailor or Marine are also in a position to identify individuals who may be in crisis and in need of help. The [Military Crisis Line](#), chaplains, corpsmen, healthcare professionals at your military treatment facility (MTF) or local branch health clinic, and your local Fleet and Family Support Center can provide help. Remember - a person needs immediate help if they show the following signs: threatens to hurt or kill him/herself or talks about wanting to hurt or kill him/herself; looks for ways to kill him/herself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means; and/or talks or writes about death, dying, or suicide.



If a person exhibits any of these signs, do not leave the person alone. Call 911, seek immediate assistance from a healthcare professional, and/or call the Military Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255; press 1.