

Zeroing In – Recharge: Sleep & Refresh

When we think about our health, we often focus on all the things we should DO. But “not doing” is also important to health. Relaxing, slowing down, finding ease, and taking pauses are important to our health as well. Here are some things to explore if you want Recharge to be a part of your Whole Health Plan.



Key Points

- Resting allows your body and mind to heal. It gives you time to pause and be mindfully aware.
- You can't work toward what really matters if you have never paused to think about what your values are!
- Good sleep is vital to our survival and our health. So are breaks at work and vacations.
- Ask your clinical team for information and guidance.

Sleep Better

Sleep Better. Good sleep helps you maintain a healthy weight, lay down memories, and flush your brain of toxins. Good sleep is linked to a better mood, less heart disease and stroke, and less diabetes. It is also linked to living longer.

- If you have sleep problems, work with your primary team to rule out (and treat) sleep apnea, thyroid problems, restless legs, prostate or bladder problems, and other medical issues that can cause poor sleep.
- There are many ways to improve sleep. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I) is one. It involves noticing your sleep patterns and practicing good sleep hygiene, which means avoiding anything that makes you less likely to sleep. Some examples:
 - Too much light from a screen before bed, or from background lights can be a problem. Try a sleep mask.
 - Decrease noises with earplugs or drown them out with white noise, like the sound from a fan.
 - Don't take too many naps during the day.
 - Go to bed and get up at the same time each day, if possible.
 - Don't drink alcohol before bed.
 - Don't drink too many other fluids either or avoid caffeine.

Take Breaks

Take Breaks. Breaks are also important. If you are busy, pause sometimes.

- If you are sitting a lot, take time to move every 30-60 minutes.
- Be sure to take vacations sometimes if you can, too. Try not to take work with you.
- Pause for longer breaks at work (15 minutes every few hours) and don't work through lunch.
- It might help to unplug from the news sometimes (do a “media fast”).

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Boost Energy

Boost Your Energy. What lowers your energy? If you can, avoid those things. What increases it? If possible, do those things more.

- There are many ways to give your energy a boost. Medications? Not the best way.
 - Be active – dance, garden, hike, go for a walk, lift weights, etc.
 - Laugh
 - Spend time with fun and inspiring people you care about
 - Find a good cause you believe in and support it.

Time for You

Take Time Just for You. Even if you can just plan for a few minutes each day for yourself, that is important.

- It is like the oxygen mask on a plane. You need to meet your needs, or you won't be in any shape to help other people.
- If you are spending a lot of time taking care of someone else, taking time for yourself to help your health.

Experts

Work with an Expert. Who would be helpful to have on your care team?

- Psychologists can help you figure out how to sleep better. Some of them are trained in CBT-I. There are sleep psychologists whose whole practice focuses on sleep.
- Sleep Consultants can offer help when it comes to screening or treating sleep apnea and other sleep disorders.
- Different mind-body approaches, like meditation, might help you. See if classes are available at your VA.
- Acupuncture might help with sleep.
- Ask your provider about melatonin. It is on the VA formulary. It is a supplement that helps sleep without causing a lot of side effects.

One Small Change

Make One Small Change. There are all sorts of possibilities. Start small with a goal you know you can reach and build from there. Here are a few more examples of things that you could put into your Personal Health Plan:

- Change one sleep hygiene behavior, such as the time you go to bed.
- Set an alarm to remind you to take breaks.
- See how being active during different times of the day helps or harms your sleep.
- Work with problems like PTSD or anxiety so you can relax more.
- If you are taking care of someone who is ill, investigate a respite care program where someone can help out so you can have a break.
- Plan a day off.
- Get a massage every so often.
- Use the CBT-I app.
- Cut down on caffeine.
- Take a three-day media fast.
- Learn how to take a power nap if your energy is dropping.
- Add one thing to your day that boosts your energy.
- Take one day when you don't do any work at all.
- Plan a dream vacation. "Staycations" can also be helpful.

Recharge Links

You can check out the links below to learn more about Recharge:

Whole Health Library Veteran Handouts. These are indexed at

<https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/veteran-handouts/index.asp>.

- An Introduction to Recharge for Whole Health. <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/Veteran-Handouts/docs/IntroRecharge-508Final-9-26-2018.pdf>.
- Hints for Encouraging Healthy Sleep. https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/veteran-handouts/docs/HealthySleep_Final508_07-25-2019.pdf.
- Change Your Habits to Sleep Better. <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/Veteran-Handouts/docs/ChangeHabitsSleepBetter-508Final-10-25-2018.pdf>.
- The Health Benefits of Pausing and Taking Breaks. <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/veteran-handouts/docs/PausingTakingBreaks-508Final-10-25-2018.pdf>.
- Counseling for Insomnia. <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/Veteran-Handouts/docs/CounselInsomnia-508Final-10-25-2018.pdf>.

Other VA Resources

- Video: A Patient-Centered Approach to Recharge. <http://youtu.be/zT-bbZmeW4I>
- Veterans' Health Library: <https://www.veteranshealthlibrary.va.gov>. Searchable for all sorts of health issues and has material on sleep and sleep-related medical problems.

Sleep Resources

- National Sleep Foundation. <https://sleepfoundation.org/>. Has articles and resources on ways to work with different sleep problems. They also have a sleep diary to help track your sleep. <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-diary>.
- Sleep Education from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. <http://www.sleepeducation.org/healthysleep>. Multiple items focused on healthy sleep and rest.
- Society of Behavioral Sleep Medicine. <https://www.behavioralsleep.org/>. Has general information on sleep disorders under the public resources section.
- American Psychological Association sleep materials. <https://www.apa.org/topics/sleep/index>.
- Integrative Restorative Institute. <https://www.irest.us/try-irest-now>. Samples of Guided Yoga Nidra iRest meditation.
- Tuck. <https://www.tuck.com/>. Resources, information, and reviews of products for sleep.
- MIT Medical. <https://medical.mit.edu/community/sleep/additional-sleep-resources>. Free Pamphlets and downloadable audio for sleep, including recordings of white noise.
- University of Wisconsin Integrative Health.
 - Handout on healthy sleep habits. http://www.fammed.wisc.edu/files/webfm-uploads/documents/outreach/im/handout_sleep.pdf.
 - Light therapy and sleep. http://www.fammed.wisc.edu/files/webfm-uploads/documents/outreach/im/handout_light_therapy.pdf.

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Taking Breaks

- Workplace Strategies for Mental Health. <https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/>. Group focused on mental health and safety in various work settings. Look under the Employee Resources for suggestions of “Healthy Break Activities”.

Boosting Your Energy

- Mayo Clinic information on fatigue. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/symptoms/fatigue/basics/definition/sym-20050894>.

Care for Caregivers

- ARCH National Respite Network and Respite Center. <https://archrespice.org>. Support for people who are full-time caregivers.

Apps

- US Department of Veterans Affairs CBT-I Coach. On iPhone App Store and Google Play for Android. <https://mobile.va.gov/app/cbt-i-coach>.
- Stand Up! The Work Break Timer. Set your own reminder for how often you want to take breaks from sitting, looking at the computer, or any activity. <https://raisedsquare.com/standup>.
- Randomly Remind Me. For Android. Set your reminders for anything you want, like taking breaks less, drinking water, and taking a moment of mindful awareness. <https://keepactive.com.au/blog/post/free-apps-to-remind-you-to-take-breaks-and-stretch>.