MOVE!

WEIGHT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM FOR VETERANS

Session 7
(Manage Stress and Handle Hunger)

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- Weight Management Team Members:
  - MOVE! Coordinator, Registered Dietitian
    - Extension 4407 or 5395
  - New Mexico VA: (505) 265-1711, Extension 4407
    - Please call the MOVE! Coordinator if late or cannot make it to class.
  - Brain Kersh, PHD – Clinical Psychologist
    - Extension 1043
  - Claudia Segura, DPT – Physical Therapist
    - Extension 5280

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Mindful Eating

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness means being fully aware of what is going on within and around you at each moment. Mindfulness can be applied to many aspects of life. Being mindful of your eating may help with weight management. Being mindful involves being aware of yourself and your surroundings physically, emotionally, and mentally. It means paying attention to each changing moment.

What is Mindful Eating?

Mindful eating takes the concept of mindfulness and applies it to why, when, where, what, and how you eat. This means being aware of both the physical and emotional feelings connected to eating.

- **Observe your body.** Notice hunger and fullness signals that guide you to start and stop eating.
- **Do not judge yourself** or your reaction to food.
- **Notice your reaction to food.** What do you like, what don't you like?
- **Savor your food.** While eating, notice all of the colors, smells, flavors, and textures of the food.

Mindfulness may help you to avoid overeating. First bites may be the most satisfying, and additional bites may not be as pleasurable. This can help with portion control.

Be aware. Ask yourself, "Am I…"

- Physically hungry? (on a scale from "1" to "10")
- Eating quickly or slowly?
- Dining in-the-moment – Am I mindlessly munching or noticing each bite?
- Multi-tasking, or truly focused on this meal or snack?
- Feeling my stomach rumbling?
- Bored, stressed, tired, anxious, angry, sad, etc.?

Here are some tips:

- Take a breath and ask yourself, "Am I truly hungry?," before you reach for food.
- Begin practicing mindfulness. Start by eating one meal a day in a slower, more aware manner.
- Focus on eating. Avoid doing other activities while you eat (working, talking on the phone, watching TV, driving, reading, etc.).
- Set a timer for 20 minutes and take the whole time to eat the meal.
- Eat silently for 5 minutes (think about what it took to produce that meal, from the sun and water, to the farmer, to the grocer, to the cook).
- Slow down. Eat with your non-dominant hand or try using chopsticks.

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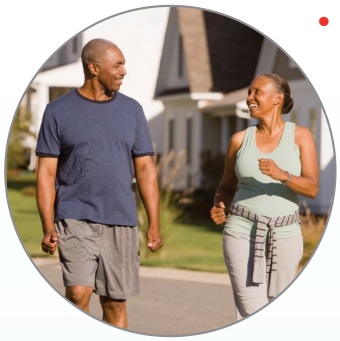
Emotions and Your Weight

Emotions often drive eating – happy, sad, excited, nervous, scared . . .

Here are some tips to help control emotional eating:

- **Eating doesn't make the problem go away!** Instead, try to deal with the problem in ways other than eating. For example, take a short walk or call a friend.
- **Think positively.** If you catch yourself thinking negatively or worrying, focus on more positive things in your life.



- **Be active.** Take a brisk walk, get on a stationary bike, or do some stretches. Exercise will make you feel better!
- **Distract yourself.** Find something else to do rather than eating. Listen to some music that lifts your spirit.
- **Avoid the kitchen.** You will be less tempted to feed your emotions.
- **Have healthy snacks readily available.** Comfort foods don't have to be unhealthy.
- **Consider getting support.** Start with family or friends. For additional assistance, consider your clergyman or talk with your health care team.

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Slow Down, You Eat Too Fast

Eating too fast is a common problem. Feeling full takes time. Learning to eat slowly takes practice!

Here are some suggestions:

- When you eat slowly, you will feel satisfied with smaller portions and eat less.
- Before eating, tell yourself to eat slowly and to taste and enjoy every bite. Post a reminder to eat slowly in front of you on the table.

- Put your fork, knife, and spoon down in-between **every bite.**

- Don't eat quickly just because others are eating fast.
- Learn to recognize and respond to early feelings of fullness. **As soon as you start to feel satisfied, stop eating,** and save what is left for the next meal. Here is a plan:
  - Use the *Making Healthy Food Choices* handout to build a healthy plate.
  - For each section of your plate, cut the foods in that section in half.

- Eat only the first half of each section of the plate, then ask yourself:
  - **How hungry am I now?**
  - **Am I any less hungry than when I started?**
  - **Am I beginning to feel satisfied?**
    - **If yes, stop eating and save the rest of your meal for later.**
    - **If no, cut the foods in half again. Continue eating.**
- Stop again when you are halfway through your meal. Ask yourself the same questions above.
- If you eat everything, ask yourself if you are satisfied. If you feel stuffed, then next time you eat, try stopping earlier. Before eating second helpings, wait 5 minutes and then ask yourself the same questions above.

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Hungry All the Time?

Here are some tips for managing your hunger:

- Real hunger comes on slowly, not all of a sudden. Pay attention to your body and learn your signs of true hunger.

- Eat 5–6 small, healthy, balanced meals. Spacing out your meals can help you manage your hunger and make you less likely to overeat at the next meal.
- Eat s-l-o-w-l-y. Actually taste what you eat.
- Eat filling, high-fiber foods such as vegetables, cereals, whole grain breads, or fruit.

Cravings are often confused with hunger. A craving is an intense desire for a specific food.

- Cravings often don't last that long. Try to wait out a craving.
- Cravings tend to be more emotional than physical. You can manage cravings by distracting yourself. Find something else to do or think about besides eating. Take a short walk or talk with a friend.
- If the craving doesn't go away, have just a little bite of what you're craving and savor it. For example, let a little piece of chocolate melt in your mouth rather than eating a whole candy bar.

Healthy Living

Manage Stress

If you are having difficulty coping with the demands in your life, you are experiencing stress. Most of us like some challenges; however, too much stress creates problems in our lives. Read the information below to learn more about stress.

How do I know if I have too much stress?

- If you have too much stress in your life, your body will let you know. Stress may be experienced in different ways. Some things you may notice include:
  - Difficulty concentrating
  - Feelings of worry and fear
  - Muscle tension
  - Sweaty palms
  - Heart pounding
  - Irritability toward others
  - Fatigue
- If you are overly stressed for a long period of time, it can put your health at risk.
- If you or someone you know is in an emotional crisis, you can call the **Veterans Crisis Line** at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**.

How can I better manage my stress?

- **Learn problem-solving skills.** Improving your problem-solving skills can help you cope. Your health care team may offer a class or information sessions on problem solving or you can visit www.startmovingforward.org.
- **Practice relaxation training.** Learning relaxation and mindfulness can help you manage stress. Daily relaxation may protect you from the impact of stress on your body. Your health care team may offer relaxation or mindfulness training or you can use the Manage Stress resources at www.prevention.va.gov/Healthy Living/Manage Stress.asp.

A Better Way to LIVE

Talk with your health care team about your goals.

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- **Use technology.** There are many mobile apps available such as *PTSD Coach, Breathe2Relax,* and *Moving Forward*.
- **Be physically active.** Take a brisk walk or engage in other physical activities. Regular physical activity is best (see the *Be Physically Active* handout: www.prevention.va.gov/docs/VANCP_HL_Be_Physically_Active_508.pdf).
- **Learn to express yourself.** Learning to share your thoughts and feelings in an assertive and respectful manner can help reduce stress. Ask your health care team for guidance.
- **Manage your time.** Make a list of what you need to get done. Then make plans for addressing the items on the list, and stick to the plan.
- **Practice positive thinking.** Stress is often associated with negative, self-critical thinking. Focus your attention on positive thoughts about yourself, your accomplishments, things you feel proud of or grateful for, etc. It can help to list 3–5 things you feel grateful for each day.
- **Plan pleasant activities.** Make time for fun. Plan regular, enjoyable activities and see if this reduces your stress. This *Pleasant Activities Tip Sheet* includes ideas for you to consider: www.prevention.va.gov/docs/PleasantActivitiesTipSheet.doc.

FOR THE MOST CURRENT INFORMATION AND OTHER RESOURCES:

- VHA National Center for Health Promotion & Disease Prevention: www.prevention.va.gov
- Veterans Health Library: www.veteranshealthlibrary.org
- VHA Mental Health Services: www.mentalhealth.va.gov
- VA-DoD Problem-Solving Program*: www.startmovingforward.org

* Indicates that the link leads to a non-VA Web site. The VA is not responsible for content on the site.

If you have questions about how to make healthy living changes, please talk with your health care team.

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Dealing With Stress, Anxiety, and Depression

Stress, anxiety, and depression can get in the way of your health. If coping becomes difficult, VA is here to help. Talk with your primary care provider.

Here are some self-management coping tips:

Change Your Thinking

- Your mood (sad, nervous, stressed, etc.) comes from your thoughts and what you tell yourself. In most cases, you can control your mood by choosing what you think about and what you tell yourself.
- When you are feeling too much stress, be aware of what you are thinking. Are these thoughts making you feel worse? If so, then replace them with more positive thoughts. Make a list of positive statements about yourself that you can use when feeling stressed. Here are some examples:
  - I am a good person.
  - I am calm and relaxed.
  - I am at peace with myself and with the world around me.
  - I can control my reaction to a situation, even if I can't control the situation.
  - I will accept the things I cannot change. I will have the courage to change the things I can, and I will learn to know the difference.

Help Your Body Handle Stress

- Your mood affects your body, and vice versa… Taking care of your body will improve your outlook.

Be Active

- Make physical activity a part of every day.
- Listen to or make music, paint, or express yourself artistically.
- Take the time to do things you enjoy!

Eat Wisely

- Eat a healthy diet high in vegetables and fruits.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Avoid managing your mood with unhealthy foods or overeating.

Reduce your Stress

- Get enough rest.
- Try a massage.
- Take a long shower or bath.
- Take a break from stressful situations: count to 10, take a deep breath, or take a few minutes to daydream about a favorite memory.
- Divide big tasks into little ones, and tackle one at a time. Plan ahead so you don't feel rushed.
- Learn how to relax and practice this regularly. Relaxation training is available through the VA.
- Arrange to have some quiet time for yourself each day.
- Talk over your troubles with someone you trust.

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- Your "Homework" This Week:
- Behavior: Identify weight-related problem and work through the steps.
- Nutritional: Keep a food log everyday. Continue to focus on restaurant dining celebration meals.
- Physical Activity:

1. Keep an activity log daily.
2. Add 10 extra minutes of activity a day