



# LIFELINK

## NEWSLETTER

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### Self-Managing Psychological Health Concerns: Work with a Provider for Maximum Benefit

Military service can be challenging at times. These challenges can lead to psychological health concerns such as feeling anxiety, worry, sadness, or having trouble sleeping. It is common for service members to try to manage concerns like these on their own. While you may be trying to self-manage already, remember that you can benefit from the support and advice of your health care provider. It is important to seek care from your provider if:

- Your concerns negatively impact your work or relationships with friends and family and/or;
- **Your concerns last for more than eight weeks.**

If you decide to self-manage, talk with your health care provider about the following techniques that can help during the process:

#### Create a Self-Management Plan

- Creating a self-management plan with your health care provider can help you stay organized and on track. Try these tips as you self-manage:
- Educate yourself about symptoms using trusted sources, such as from your health care provider or a symptom checker from **Make the Connection**.
- Visit your health care provider on a regular basis to make sure you are making progress.
- Set **realistic expectations** of when your concerns may improve.
- Keep track of your progress and results.
- Reach out to those who may have had similar concerns, such as attending a support group.
- Share your plan with loved ones so they can help support your goals.

#### Learn to Self-Manage Your Concerns

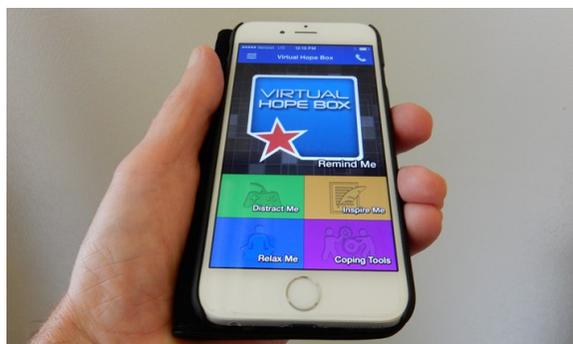
Your provider may offer several techniques to help you manage your concerns. Research shows that the self-management techniques below support your psychological health and improve your well-being. Talk with a provider to see which of these may work best for you:

- Exercise such as running, brisk walking or **tai chi** can **improve sleep, and reduce symptoms of anxiety, anger and depression.**
- Visit your health care provider on a regular basis to make sure you are making progress.
- **Mindfulness meditation** has been shown to **decrease symptoms of anxiety and depression.**
- **Proper sleep habits** play an important role in your overall health and well-being.
- **Relaxation techniques** such as yoga and breathing exercises can help to reduce symptoms of stress such as tension.

Mobile apps can be great tools for helping you self-manage. Use apps to support care and track and share health information with your health care provider. For example, the **Breathe2Relax** app uses proven breathing exercises to relieve stress and improve your mood. The **Mindfulness Coach** app provides you with tools and guided exercises to help you practice mindfulness. For a list of more apps, take a look at the Defense Health Agency Connected Health **website**.

Self-managing is not a solution for everyone nor every situation, and that is okay. You can also reach out to your local TRICARE facility or healthcare provider for additional resources. Treatment will depend on your specific concerns.

*The following is a guest blog post provided courtesy of the Real Warriors Campaign. More information and tools are available at [www.realwarriors.net](http://www.realwarriors.net).*



## Lifelink Spotlight

### Providing a Helping Hand with “ASIST”

The ability to recognize signs and intervene is a key component of suicide prevention. Sailors and Marines aboard the USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) learned how to assist fellow service members through the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) course.

In the two-day ASIST course, participants learn “what suicide is, how to recognize those thoughts and behaviors in other people and practice specific ways to intervene,” according to Lt. Cmdr. John Mabus, the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit command chaplain and instructor of the course, quoted in this [Navy.mil story](#).

One of the primary barriers that ASIST addresses is the shame associated with help-seeking. “They’re not weak. They’re just reaching out for help,” says Sgt. Kodi Simon, a recent graduate and Marine. “They just want a shoulder to lean on.”

A key part of intervention is to ACT (Ask Care Treat) and help the person at-risk identify a plan and support network which may include friends, family, fellow Sailors, and leaders. This support network can show the at-risk individual that they care by encouraging them to seek treatment from a mental health care provider.

“Suicide prevention is possible,” says Aerographer’s Mate 3rd Class Danielle Rizzo. “Some people think that once someone goes down this downward spiral, they can’t be helped. You can help them, simply by just being a shoulder to lean on or just someone there to listen.”

For more information on ASIST workshops, contact your local chaplain or Chaplains Religious Enrichment Development Operation Office.

*Bonus: The Every Sailor, Every Day campaign’s IS PATH WARM infographic and poster can help you and your shipmates identify behavioral changes that may indicate more immediate risk of suicide. Share the infographic on command-operated social media and place the poster in high-traffic spaces aboard your ship or installation.*



## Plan of the Week Notes

*Below are sample Plan of the Week notes aligning with topics covered by the Every Sailor, Every Day campaign during the month of June:*

1. Men are 24% less likely to have visited a doctor in the past year than women. Seeing a medical provider for preventive care is a key component of ensuring that you are healthy. More tips on ways to make choices that keep you in optimal physical, psychological and emotional health are available on the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center's infographic, "Men's Health: Investing in the Future is not a Game." Check it out at <https://go.usa.gov/cSdwx>.
2. Stress injuries, harmful behaviors and suicide risk can increase when Sailors are dealing with significant changes or difficult situations such as permanent change of station (PCS) moves, which are frequent in summer months. Practicing lethal means safety by properly storing firearms and making sure certain prescription drugs are properly disposed of can help keep Sailors safe during high-stress times.
3. Staying connected with friends and family is a great way to alleviate stress. But what do you do when a friend’s posts on social media leave you concerned about their psychological and emotional well-being? Find tips on how to recognize risk and reach out on our blog at <https://navstress.wordpress.com/2017/09/22/recognizing-risk-and-reaching-out-to-a-friend-on-social-media/>.
4. The BeThere Peer Support Call and Outreach Center connects Service members with peers who can provide emotional support for difficult situations. Connect with them online at [www.betherepeersupport.org](http://www.betherepeersupport.org), by phone at 1-844-357-PEER (7337) or via text at 480-360-6188.

## Gun Locks for Lethal Means Safety

Navy Suicide Prevention Branch (OPNAV N171), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Defense Suicide Prevention Office (DSPO) have partnered to provide gun locks to suicide prevention coordinators (SPCs) at CONUS Naval Hospitals and Naval Branch Medical Clinics. Patients assessed to be at risk for suicide who also own firearms should be given a gun lock and educated on the importance of reducing access to lethal means during periods of crisis. Providers are reminded of [NAVADMIN 263/14](#) when discussing high risk cases with commands. This evidence-based program has been legally approved and there are no additional legal or administrative requirements for the command. Contact Mr. Vic Gooden with OPNAV N171 at 901-874-6613 or [victor.gooden@navy.mil](mailto:victor.gooden@navy.mil) for more information.

## News and Resources

Helping Your Patients Understand the Types of Military Mental Health Providers

[Psychological Health Center of Excellence](#)

Quick Tips for Parenting Alone During your Partner's Deployment

[Human Performance Resource Center](#)

Department of Defense-Morale, Welfare and Recreation Summer Reading Program

[Military OneSource](#)

5 Hacks to Stay Healthy While on Vacation

[Guard Your Health](#)

Top 10 Things to Know About inTransition

[Psychological Health Center of Excellence](#)

The Military's A+ Financial Benefits to Protect Your Future

[Military OneSource](#)

Bed Partners, Sleep Habits, and the Path to Sweet Dreams

[Human Performance Resource Center](#)

Vicarious Traumatization, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout: The Hazards of Compassion in Military Mental Health

[Psychological Health Center of Excellence](#)

How to Deal with Stress as a Caregiver

[Military OneSource](#)

WOOP: 4 Simple Steps to Help you Achieve your Goals

[Human Performance Resource Center](#)

5 Ways Hearing Loss Can Affect Your Life

[Guard Your Health](#)

## Current and Upcoming Events

**Men's Health Month**  
**PTSD Awareness Month**  
**LGBT Pride Month**  
June

**U.S. Army's 243rd Birthday**  
June 14, 2018

**SPC Training Webinars**  
June 20, 6 p.m. CDT  
July 12, 8 a.m. CDT  
[Register here](#)

## Staying Safe with Prescription Pain Medications

Justin joined the Navy a few years ago, right out of high school. He loves being a Sailor and enjoys his job. After experiencing an on-the-job injury, he goes to his nearest military treatment facility (MTF) for treatment and receives a prescription pain medication. His injury was serious, so he takes the prescription regularly to minimize his pain. After a week, the pain is more tolerable but he continues taking the same dosage regularly because he is used to doing so to avoid the pain he was feeling immediately after his injury. He considers using his medication less as he recovers, but he still has medication remaining and wants to stay pain-free.



If you've ever had surgery or gotten injured, you may understand how Justin is feeling. Being in pain is stressful and can take a toll on you physically and emotionally. Prescription pain medications can feel like a lifesaver in these circumstances. But continuing to take them after most of the pain has diminished can lay an unintentional foundation for misuse or addiction.

Opioids are a type of drug that is naturally found in the opium poppy plant. Prescription opioids are used as pain relievers for moderate to severe pain like the acute, temporary pain after a surgery or injury, or chronic pain conditions such as backache, arthritis, or migraines. Opioids relax the body, affect the brain and can be addictive if misused. Some commonly prescribed opioids are hydrocodone, oxycodone, morphine, fentanyl and codeine.

After an injury or a surgery, some level of pain is expected and normal, especially in the initial days. The goal should not be to eliminate pain altogether but manage it so that you're able to function. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [study](#) shows that for first-time use, the number of days taking prescription opioids can impact "long-term" use. The study found that 13.5% of individuals prescribed opioids for eight or more days were still using them one year later, as were 29.9% of those with a 31+ day prescription. But a prescription for an opioid does not have to be a one-way ticket to addiction if you are cautious. The following tips can help you can manage your pain without the risk of misuse or addiction:

- Assess your own pain over time and **ask your health care provider** if the prescribed dosage is still necessary for your level of pain.
- Consider over-the-counter (OTC) pain medications such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen if don't have any preexisting conditions that may cause a negative reaction. They come in various strengths and may be suitable for pain from broken bones or oral surgery.
- Utilize **comprehensive pain management** which incorporates physical therapy, relaxation techniques, and other methods to help manage chronic pain. Complementary methods such as **acupuncture**, **chiropractic care**, massage and gentle yoga all have some evidence of effectiveness for **chronic pain** management.
- Practice ways to "self-manage" pain, like incorporating an appropriate level of both activity and rest into each day during your recovery. Small lifestyle tweaks can help minimize discomfort and the need for prescription medication, reducing risk of misuse.

Prescription opioids are safe and helpful when taken for short amounts of time. Follow the **Prescription for Discharge** campaign's four steps to avoid misusing prescription drugs: 1.) Take Correctly, 2.) Report Promptly, 3.) Dispose Properly and 4.) Never Share.

Seeking help promptly is the best thing you can do for prescription drug misuse. Signs of misuse include mood swings or hostility, abnormal energy, significant changes in fatigue or sleep, seeking prescriptions from more than one doctor, asking friends and family members for their medication, and claiming that a prescription was lost or stolen.

If you recognize these signs within yourself or others, speak with your command Drug and Alcohol Program Advisor (DAPA) or doctor, or call 1-866-U-ASK-NPC.