



The VA Caregiver Support Line Celebrates
Veteran Caregivers

“Caregiving Around the Clock”

Caregiver Self-Care Activity Book



Happy National Family Caregivers Month!

Thank you for all that you do to care for our nation's Veterans.

We hope this activity booklet provides you with fun and soothing ideas for self-care.

◇ Lighthearted activities



◇ Creative projects

◇ Tips to treat yourself to simple pleasures



◇ Ideas to help take care of you

Enjoy these moments of fun and self-care.

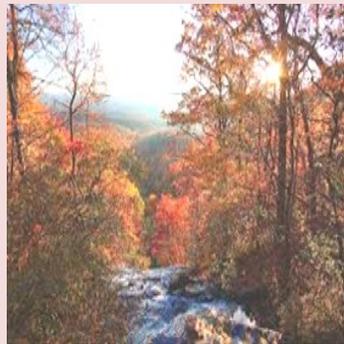
Caregiver support is just a phone call away.
Call the VA Caregiver Support Line today at 1-855-260-3274!



Open a Window and let the Outside in!



Go outside! Relax for a few minutes
and let your cares drift away!



Tip: To minimize distractions, leave your cell phone inside

Stretch Away

Stretching increases flexibility, range of motion, and energy levels. It reduces muscle tension, and provides relaxation and stress relief. Best of all it can be done almost any time and any place.

- ◇ Consult with a physician prior to starting any new fitness routine.
- ◇ Warm up your muscles with light exercises, such as walking in place and arm circles for 5 to 10 minutes **before** doing any stretch.
- ◇ Hold each stretch for 10–30 seconds (you've stretched too far if you feel pain).
- ◇ Breathe freely and do not bounce.

Triceps Stretch – Lift your right arm up and over your head, bending at your elbow. Grasp your elbow with your left hand and gently pull towards your left shoulder. Hold and switch arms.



Neck Stretch – With the palm of your right hand gently pull your head to your right shoulder. Hold the stretch and then repeat on the other side.

Calf Stretch – Stand at arms length from a wall. Place your right foot behind your left foot. Bend the front knee, keeping the right leg straight and the heel of your back foot on the ground. Repeat for the other side.



Pelvic Stretch – Stand tall and bring one knee to your chest, keeping the other foot flat on the floor. If needed, place one hand on a wall or the back of a chair for support. Hold and hug. Repeat on the other side.

Lower Back, Hamstrings and Calves – Start by stretching both arms over your head, palms facing forward and your abdominal muscles pulled in. Bend forward from the waist allowing your weight to roll your body forward toward the ground. Reach your hands toward your toes.



Quad Stretch – Stand with your feet hip-width apart and your back straight. Hold a wall or chair for support if needed. Grab your right foot in your right hand. Keep your thighs lined up next to each other and your right leg in line with the hip. Repeat on the other side.



Take Time for YOU

H B R E A T H E L D X W C E P
 S T R E T C H I N G A Z A I L
 T T A K E A N A P T L R L V A
 G A B B J Q F V C M E E L O Y
 N F K O E B A H A T R X A M C
 I M G E X L A P T R O E F A A
 T A L R A M B E K F T R R O R
 N K F N O W L B S Z G C I T D
 I E B V U A A V U C N I E O S
 A T I L E O V L N B I S N G L
 P E J T I H N G K T R E D G A
 S A I E E F F O C F O P U C R
 V R E G A S S A M P L L B A Y
 W K O O B A D A E R O W A V V
 D H W H A V E I C E C R E A M

As you search for these words and phrases, take a moment to reflect upon each idea. Which activities could you incorporate into your self-care routine?

COLORING TO RELAX
 TAKE A WALK
 WATCH A MOVIE
 WRITE A LETTER
 MASSAGE
 PAINTING
 PLAY CARDS

READ A BOOK
 BUBBLEBATH
 TAKE A NAP
 HAVE ICE CREAM
 CUP OF COFFEE
 EXERCISE
 BREATHE

JOG
 GO TO A MOVIE
 CALL A FRIEND
 MAKE TEA
 STRETCHING

Mindfulness Glitter Jar

**“In a world full of doing, doing, doing...
it’s important to take a moment to just breathe, to just be.”**

Supplies:

Mason Jar with lid
Water
Dish Soap
Glitter
Glitter Glue (optional)



Instructions:

1. Fill the jar entirely with water. Add glitter and a few drops of dish soap.
2. Place lid on jar and close tightly.
3. Shake it up! (if needed, add a few more drops of dish soap)
4. When you need a break from the demands of caregiving or life in general, shake up the jar. As the glitter settles, breathe deeply and let your thoughts settle just as the glitter settles in the jar.

The glitter in the jar **represents all the negative thoughts** and feelings racing through your mind; household chores, errands, the Veteran’s care needs, family obligations, financial stressors, appointments, or negative feelings such as anger, depression, or anxiety. Focus on your breath as the glitter settles to the bottom of the jar, the water becomes clearer. **Just as the water clears, your mind will become clearer as you take time to focus on your breath and accept what is.**

Guidelines for Making Friends and Improving Your Social Life

Friendship does not just happen – it takes work to **CREATE** a friendship and work to **SUSTAIN** it or keep it going. Reach out!



- ◇ **Make a list** of all of your family members, friends, neighbors, or social contacts who you can connect with when you need support. It may be difficult to think of or remember who you can reach out to especially if you're stressed. A list can be a helpful reminder.
- ◇ **Join a club** – Join a book club, go to your local community center, and get involved in hobbies where you will meet people with common interests.
- ◇ **Attend an event** – A lecture, fundraiser, concert, or festival
- ◇ **Take a class** – Cooking, yoga, guitar lessons, painting, or gardening
- ◇ **Connect with friends online** – Chat, blogs, Facebook, or shared interests
- ◇ **Re-connect with old friends and/or classmates** – Does your school have a website for graduated classes, could you become a member?
- ◇ **Reach out** – Write a letter, make a phone call, or send an email
- ◇ **Take a walk** – Walk with your pet or borrow your neighbor's pet. People often connect with animals.

TIP: Treat your friends the way you would like to be treated!

Walk Down Memory Lane



Take a few minutes to think back to a time when you were happiest and feeling like the best version of yourself. Now, find a photograph of yourself that was taken during that time. It could be a photograph from when you were 7 or 77! A photograph of just you or with family and friends.

Take time to reflect on yourself during that time. What makes YOU special? What about that time helped you to get your needs met? What was helping you to **feel strong, safe, supported, and happy**? Who or what was important? What are the feelings that arise when you look at this picture?



Reflecting back on a happy or joyful time is powerful. It can **ignite gratitude, hope, or remind you of your strengths.**



The photo can serve as a reminder of the ups and downs on your journey and remind you of how **resilient and unique** you are given all that you have been through!

Laughter is Such Good Medicine



Take a Moment to Laugh...

- ◇ Watch a funny movie or comedian perform
- ◇ Search YouTube for funny bloopers or funny animal videos
- ◇ Play a silly game or dance
- ◇ Read some comics or funny papers
- ◇ Tell a joke

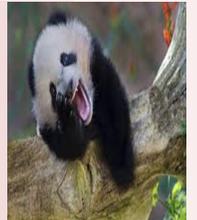
What do you call a pig that knows karate?

A pork chop!



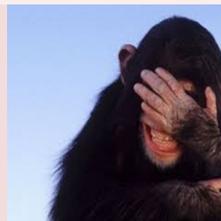
How do you make a tissue dance?

You put a little boogie in it!

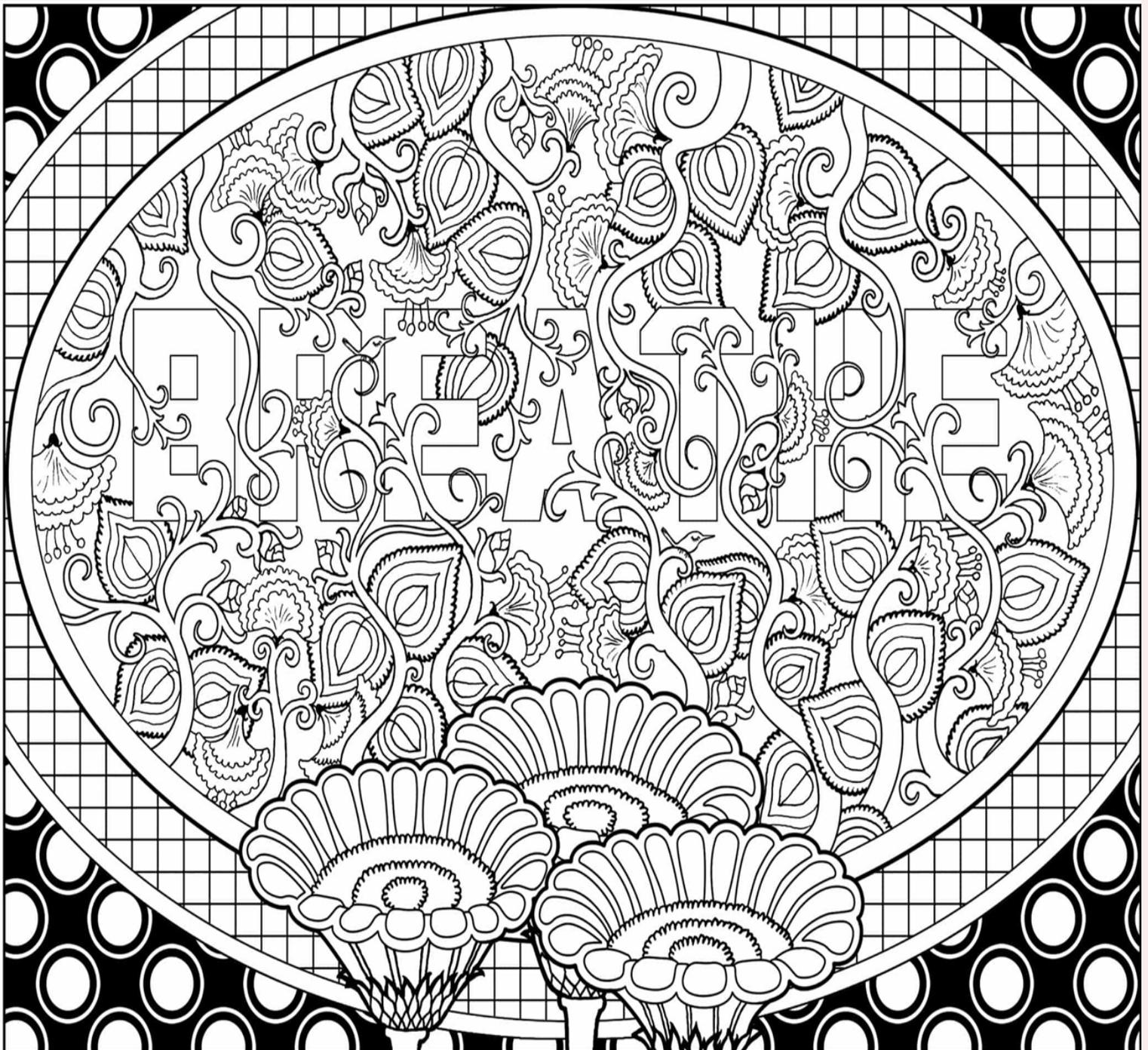


What do you call a cow on a trampoline?

A milk shake!



Look at these pictures and force laughter until you are laughing for real!



Calm Down and Color!

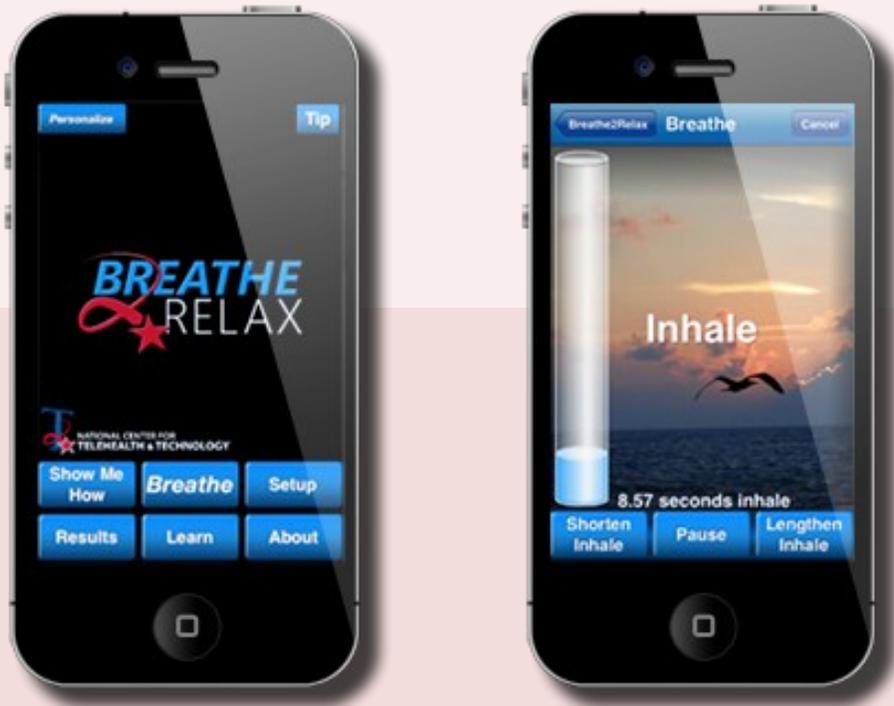
"Breathe - Fun Background" a coloring page by Heidi Hanson

www.new-synapse.com

Look closely among the trees and vines for a hidden reminder. Consider making some copies and invite friends over for a coloring party. Coloring can be fun as a group! Remember to **breathe as you color**. To enhance relaxation, listen to some calming music or nature sounds as you color. Don't worry about the colors you use. The main point of this activity is to focus and settle, **allow your breathing to slow and find a peaceful, natural rhythm**. Relax your neck, shoulders and forget about stress for a while.

Breathe2Relax App

If you have a smart phone, try this free App



Breathe2Relax is a **hands-on diaphragmatic breathing exercise**, also called “belly breathing.” Breathing exercises have been documented to decrease the body’s ‘fight-or-flight’ (stress) response, and **help with mood stabilization, anger control, and anxiety management.**

You can download the app here:

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

Comfort Stone



◇ What is a comfort stone?

Comfort stones are smooth polished gemstones usually oval shaped with an indentation.

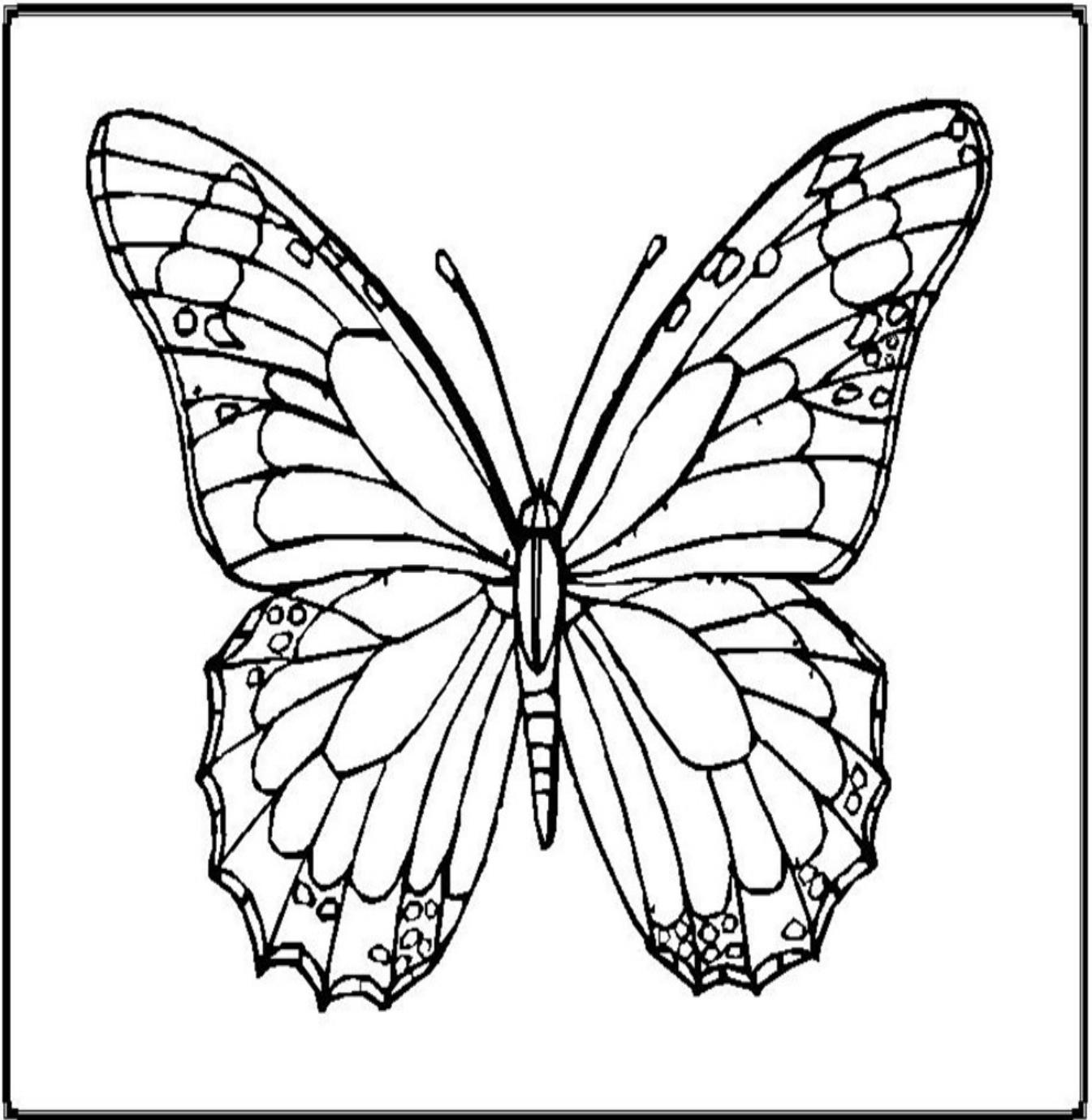
They are used for **relaxation or relief from anxiety.**

◇ How do you use a comfort stone?

Place the comfort stone in your hand holding it between the index finger and thumb. Gently move your thumb back and forth across the stone.

The object used for comfort can be **whatever you choose.**

For example a **medallion, stone, or rock** can be found at your local arts and crafts store. If you like, you can write a word or phrase on your object.



"Happiness is like a butterfly:

The more you chase it, the more it will elude you, but if you turn your attention to other things, it will come and sit softly on your shoulder."

Henry David Thoreau

Find additional coloring pages at <http://bebopandco.com/>

Crafting with a Coffee Can

Craft activities enhance cognition and memory. Art is a creative outlet of your expression.

Minimal resources are required and this activity is budget friendly. Does your local craft store offer a weekly discount coupon?

◇ **Make a vase.** Use ribbon and decorate with things you already have around the house. Put flowers in the vase from your own garden.



◇ **Make a lantern.** Use a hammer and nail to puncture the can in a decorative pattern. Place a tea light candle inside.



◇ **Get organized.** Use some twine and hot glue to wrap around the can.



◇ **Decorate.** Use natural items you find outside on your walk such as acorns or sticks.



Journaling

Journaling is a creative and therapeutic activity that you can do for yourself anywhere, anytime. You can explore your innermost thoughts, feelings and experiences.

How do you want to journal?



Pen and Paper



Computer

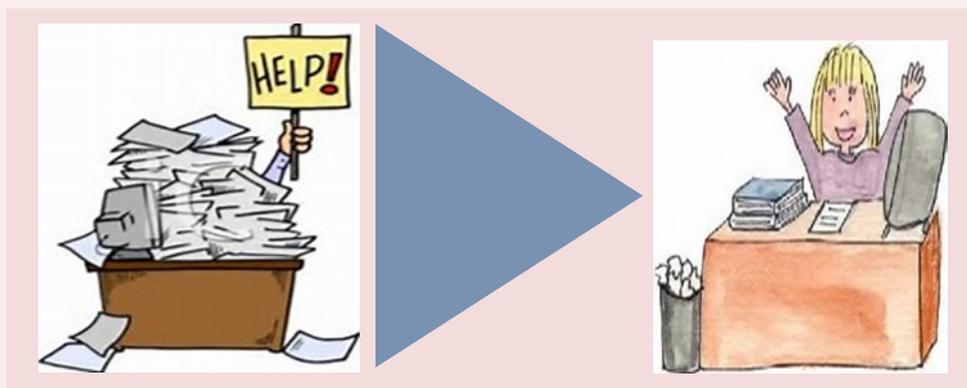


Smartphone App

Ideas to get the words flowing:

- ◇ Stream of consciousness: Write down whatever comes to your mind for five minutes.
- ◇ How are you feeling today?
- ◇ What are your dreams or goals?
- ◇ Describe a moment you have experienced today through your senses. For example, something you saw, heard, felt, tasted or smelled.
- ◇ Describe your perfect day.
- ◇ What are your strengths?

Calm the Clutter, Ease the Stress



Organize Important Documents

- ◇ Use a 3-holed punch to save information from the Veteran's medical team or insert smaller papers into plastic protective sheets, add your own notes and use dividers to separate as you like (i.e. doctors notes, labs, education, benefits, important papers, etc.).



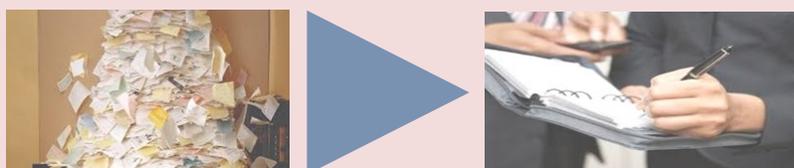
Organize Medications

- ◇ Choose the pill organizer that best fits your needs and the Veteran's medication regimen to fill a weeks worth of medications. You can dispense them daily and order refills in a timely manner too!



Keep a Calendar

- ◇ Do you lose track of appointments? Try this: An appointment book or cell phone calendar.



Self-Soothe Using the 5 Senses



◇ **Vision:** Imagine a safe, relaxing, beautiful place you would like to be (beach, garden or sunset).



◇ **Hearing:** Imagine the sound of the waves or lack of sound in a quiet room. Listen to relaxing music or sing.



◇ **Smell:** Refresh with the power of smell. Aromatherapy is a natural stress reliever you can get from scented candles, oils, incense, a diffuser, fresh air, and flowers.



◇ **Taste:** Eat a healthy snack, have a cup of herbal tea (cinnamon, jasmine, peppermint, or chamomile), use herbs (basil, dill, garlic, or parsley).



◇ **Touch:** Skin being the largest organ of the body makes it a powerful tool to comfort (pet an animal, take a bath, a long hot shower or stretch your muscles).

Treat Yourself to Dinner

Whether you are eating alone or with a guest, treating your meal as a special event can bring moments of comfort and pleasure. Treat yourself to taking some time today by making your mealtime an event.



- ◇ Consider; is there a special food or favorite meal that you are craving?
- ◇ Create your menu with care
- ◇ Set your table as if you were inviting a special guest
- ◇ Bring nature to the table such as flowers, colorful fall leaves, or arrange fruit
- ◇ Light some candles
- ◇ Use your special dishes, glasses and linens just for you
- ◇ Put on some dinner music
- ◇ Sit down and give thanks
- ◇ Enjoy every bite slowly



Thank you! The VA Caregiver Support Line appreciates all that you do every day as a caregiver.

We are here to support you!

We invite you to call the VA Caregiver Support Line toll free at **1 (855) 260-3274**. Our social workers are available to provide ongoing emotional support, information, and advocacy.

You may also find online information and tools to assist you in your caregiving journey at www.caregiver.va.gov.

Make sure to check out our Self-Care Assessment and Daily Attention Diaries with a host of ideas to keep you in balance:

https://www.caregiver.va.gov/National_Family_Caregivers_Month.asp