

Veteran Voices SITREP - Episode #31
How Proper Sleep Aids Mental Health - Part 4-4

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[Chris Faust]

Shift work and irregular schedules will have significant impacts on both your mental and physical health.

[Tom Faust]

A lot of times, even on your phone or computers, they'll have a setting that after a certain time of day, it reduces the blue light on the device and the screen will actually have a slight yellowish tint to it. Welcome to Veteran Voices, SITREP with your hosts, Tom and Chris Faust. Welcome to Veteran Voices.

I am your host, Tom Faust, here with my son and co-host, Chris. And today we are on part four of a four-part series on mental health and wellness strategies. The first part, we talked about mindfulness and meditation.

The second part, we discussed physical fitness and its effects on mental health. Third one, we talked about nutrition and mental health. And today we're talking about how proper sleep aids your mental health.

So this one we're going to start on now. And let's start with the importance of getting good quality sleep.

[Chris Faust]

Yeah. So sleep greatly affects your mental health and overall well-being and plays a crucial role in a couple of different points. One of them being emotional regulation.

It's going to be essential for processing emotions and stress. Adequate sleep helps regulate these emotional responses while sleep deprivation can increase your emotional reactivity and irritation or irritability. Mental health disorders are also linked to poor sleep quality and things like depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder.

Sleep problems can contribute and increase these conditions. So in order to help your cognitive function, it's vital that you get sleep for these processes. So it'll affect your attention, learning, memory of things.

Lack of sleep impairs the functions and it makes it difficult to cope with daily stresses and affecting some of your decision-making abilities. And then there's also a bidirectional relationship between sleep and mental health. While poor sleep can lead to mental health problems, existing mental health issues can also disrupt your sleep patterns.

[Tom Faust]

Indeed. Yeah. And the impact on the overall well-being, sleep will support your physical health by allowing your body to repair itself, boosting your immune system and reducing the risk of chronic conditions like obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

And it also can increase your quality of life. It's associated with being overall, you know, your overall quality of life with improved mood, energy levels, and physical health. Adequate sleep helps manage your stress levels as well by reducing the cortisol levels and promoting redoxation.

And this enhances your resilience against daily challenges. Sufficient sleep also can reduce the risk of accidents because, you know, if you're tired and you kind of fall asleep, you don't want to be falling asleep while you're driving or doing anything that requires you to be alert and to, you know, to have better concentration. So you really want to make sure that you get enough sleep overall and try to avoid these problems that, you know, addressing can help you reduce things like that.

Because prioritizing good sleep is essential for maintaining both mental health and overall well-being. Addressing sleep problems helps you lead to significant improvements in your emotional stability, cognitive function, physical health, and your quality of life.

[Chris Faust]

Yeah. There's also quite a bit of research on poor sleep. And this research has shown that the poor sleep can have significant consequences on physical and mental health.

Some of the short-term consequences, which we've mentioned briefly, cognitive impairment, which lack of sleep leads to reduced attention, slower reaction times, impaired judgment, and difficulties in learning and memory retention. These deficits can affect academic performance, work productivity, and increase the risk of accidents. Poor sleep also helps or also affects mood swings, mood changes, because sleep deprivation is associated with increased stress, anxiety, irritability, depression, imbalanced emotional responses to things, and it makes it harder to manage your daily stressors.

And then obviously the physical health risks, you know, lack of sleep increases the risk of accidents and injuries due to impaired motor skills and drowsiness. Some of the long-term consequences, chronic health conditions. So sleep deprivation is linked to increased risks for chronic conditions like obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension.

It affects your mental health. So, you know, persistent sleep problems can contribute to the development of depression and anxiety. Insomnia significantly increases the likelihood of experiencing these different conditions.

Then you'll also notice some cognitive decline. So poor sleep will affect you by, you know,

potentially causing, you know, I mean, there's been some reports of dementia happening. So sleep helps clear out different proteins from the brain, which are linked to Alzheimer's.

Lack of sleep can accelerate their accumulation. Poor sleep quality and duration have also been associated with an increased risk of early mortality. And, you know, probably due to some of the cumulative effects from both mental and physical health.

As always with anything, you know, do your own research, looking up these things here to get specifics, but these are just some of the common things that, you know, we've seen around and done a little digging on ourselves. If your sleep issues persist, you know, it might be beneficial even to seek professional help for evaluation or treatment to help figure out what is going on and why.

[Tom Faust]

Yeah. And there are some common sleep disruptors for veterans that we'd like to discuss. A lot of these are PTSD related, like nightmares and hypervigilance.

And you can address those with, you know, a combination of therapeutic interventions, support systems, lifestyle changes. And we have a few strategies that can help. There's one called cognitive behavioral therapy.

It's widely recommended for treating PTSD and focuses on changing unhelpful thought patterns and behaviors related to trauma. And different types, you know, there's different types such as cognitive processing therapy, prolonged exposure therapy, et cetera. And these help PTSD symptoms like the nightmares and hypervigilance.

There's eye movement desensitization and reprocessing. This one involves processing traumatic memories while engaged in guided eye movements, which can help reduce the emotional impact of the trauma and the memories. Medications also, you know, definitely you want to talk with your doctor or medical professionals before dealing with any medications.

And you want to try and keep those to a minimum because chemicals, you know, sometimes they help, but maybe there's better ways to handle it. But there are things like sertraline and paroxetine. These are conditionally recommended for managing PTSD, and they can alleviate anxiety and improve your sleep quality.

It's really good to have a peer support group. So if you can join a peer support group that gives you a sense of community and understanding from others and people who've experienced similar traumas as you, these can be very helpful. You can also get professional support with, you know, regular sessions with a mental health professional.

This can provide ongoing support and adjustments to treatment plans as needed. And of course, you know, adjustments to your lifestyle can help, like adjusting, you know, your regular sleep routine, creating a comfortable environment, avoiding stimulants before bedtime, like,

you know, cut off caffeine earlier in the day so that by the time it's bedtime, you can actually sleep and improve the quality of your sleep. Reduced alcohol can help with that as well because alcohol interrupts your sleep.

And then as we mentioned in the first session, I think it was, mindfulness and relaxation techniques. These can also help, you know, breathing exercises, the slow breathing to calm yourself when you need to, or meditative breathing, just concentrating on your breath. Progressive muscle relaxation, just kind of feel everything in your body and just allow muscles to relax.

All of these can help reduce stress. And of course, physical activity, getting the exercise, which you've also discussed previously. This can help reduce anxiety and improve your mood and can also alleviate PTSD symptoms.

So combining these strategies together can really work toward improving your overall mental health and quality of life.

[Chris Faust]

Yeah. And lack of sleep can also have a lot of impact on your work shifts and, you know, with irregular schedules. So shift work and irregular schedules will have significant impacts on both your mental and physical health because, you know, these work patterns disrupt your body's natural rhythms, which are crucial for regulating your sleep-wake cycles and other bodily functions.

It's one of those big things of, you know, when you're in sort of a routine, you know, everything's fine, your brain can process everything and it, you know, and it's great, then something comes up, whether you're having to work extra overtime or, you know, somebody calls out and you have to, you know, work for them, then, you know, that kind of disrupts your flow of things. So that way you're, it's affecting you to where you're like, okay, this, I don't like this. This isn't right.

And then it, you know, it can affect multiple things, but knowing this, knowing that it can happen and, you know, knowing, okay, yeah, something might be out of whack, we just need to try and kind of work on that and adjust to, adjust to the changes. Sleep disturbances can be the cause of these, you know, scheduling changes, increased fatigue, impaired cognitive function, higher risk of potential accidents, both at work and even during commutes. Chronic health issues can also come from these, you know, potential breaks in your normal routine.

You know, we mentioned it before, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, the mental aspect of shift work and changes like that contributes to depression, burnout. Burnout's a big one for when you have to work extra and you weren't expecting it. So it's important for anyone who experiences this to maintain a consistent sleep schedule as best as possible and engage in healthy lifestyle practices like regular exercise, balanced nutrition, you know, seek support from

a professional if you need to.

But finding a way to wind down from the extra stresses will really help you handle it better when it happens to you.

[Tom Faust]

So there are some things that you can do to, you know, to improve your sleep quality. The biggest things are keeping a regular time to go to sleep and to wake up. The more consistent you are, the better.

So the consistency is good. If you need to make changes, try and make them gradual. Do it in smaller amounts per day for a little while until your body adjusts.

This helps you get a smoother transition to whatever your new schedule is. You know, if you can do that, it's best to do that. And then, you know, prioritize sleep.

Sleep is amazingly important. It's sometimes we don't realize we think, oh, it's a waste of time because we have so much to do, but you'll get more done by getting enough sleep.

[Chris Faust]

Yeah. And also they kind of recommend like, you know, you know, from like 18 to 64 or whatever, like seven to nine hours of sleep and, you know, 65 and over, you know, seven to eight hours. And that's just, that seems like a lot of sleep, but, you know, everybody is different.

So, you know, what, whatever's going to work for you to make you feel better is probably the way to go with that. Another thing that can help with sleep hygiene is, was touched on briefly before, but, you know, a relaxing bedtime routine. So winding down before bed is really helpful.

Me typically at night, I'll play, you know, play some games, whether it's, you know, you know, if it's, you know, call of duty or, you know, any sort of other game where my brain is really active with doing things. And then sometimes you can end up with, you know, either, you know, something bad happens and you get frustrated. But your brain's like in high gear.

And if you try and go to sleep right after that, that's going to, you know, really affect being able to sleep. So winding down is a huge thing. So one thing that I will do is I have my Kindle.

So I will typically read for a little bit while relaxing and calming down, letting my brain adjust. So that way it's ready. And then, then I can usually sleep a little bit better and then limiting screen time on electronic devices will also help too.

So, you know, that's, you know, on your, on your phone, you know, don't be on your phone, you know, scrolling through Facebook or Tik TOK or whatever you, whatever you might watch, you know, when you're trying to sleep, you know, try and calm down, try and relax yourself. And then, you know, any relaxation techniques that might help, you know, deep breathing,

meditation, you know, whatever you need to do to help just create a routine and stick with it. And that'll definitely help your sleep.

[Tom Faust]

And on that, the topic of the screen time. Yeah. The main reason is you want to avoid the blue light.

Blue light is what kind of keeps your, keeps you awake. And a lot of times that even on your phone or computers, they'll have a setting that after a certain time of day, it reduces your, the blue light on the device and the screen will actually have a slight yellowish tint to it. That's more relaxing for your eyes and for your brain before you go to sleep.

So if you're going to be on a device, try and use that mode that reduces the blue light. But that's why, yeah, you don't want to have a TV on when you're trying to go to sleep because it's not only distracting because of the sound, but the light and the flashing of things can be distracting as well. So yeah.

Control your light exposure. Try and keep your bedroom dark. Blackout curtains are great.

If some light is bothering you, you can use an eye mask. Other things, you know, that the reducing light does is it helps support melatonin production in your body and the natural circadian rhythms like Chris mentioned earlier. And of course, you know, reducing noise.

I like to use a small fan. So it's a constant sound in the background. That's the white noise, right?

And that always helps. And you can use soft music or, you know, usually on any of the music apps, you can find things like meditation music, where it's just music in the background, all instrumental and easy to listen to. And that'll help you sleep as well.

You want to keep the temperature in your room, you know, 65 to 68 degrees generally. If you get too warm, you start sweating when you sleep, you're going to be uncomfortable, it's going to wake you up. And of course, you want your bed to be comfortable and things that just fit you well.

Sheets that are material that you like, a soft pillow, you know, that's at the right height for your neck and all that.

[Chris Faust]

So there are a bunch of different sleep disorders and things that can happen. But there's just a couple of real common ones that we'll touch on briefly. Obviously, you know, talk to a, you know, medical professional if you need to, you know, do a lot of research on them.

Just a couple of the big ones that are, you know, common ones that I have. One of them is

insomnia. And that's basically described as difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up too early and not being able to fall back asleep.

And it can be, you know, chronic, intermittent, or, you know, transient. So there are a couple of treatments that are available for insomnia. One is the cognitive behavioral therapy.

And it's basically a structured program that helps address the thoughts and behaviors that can cause or worsen your sleep problems. You know, there might be some medications that'll be prescribed, like, you know, sleep aids for, you know, potential short-term relief. And then, you know, the sleep hygiene we mentioned, improving those sleep practices can really help regulate the insomnia and, you know, restful environment, avoiding caffeine and electronics before bed.

Another common one is sleep apnea. And that's basically described as a breathing disorder that is characterized by repeated interruptions in breathing during sleep. That includes obstructive sleep apnea and central sleep apnea.

So some treatments for these here. If you need to, there's like, you know, a CPAP machine. So that's continuous positive airway pressure.

And it basically uses mild air pressure to keep the airways open. Devices can be worn in the mouth while asleep to keep the throat open. You know, some cases you might need surgery, but snoring is a huge thing that can happen when you're just not positioned right.

Or if your body is just so worn out and your brain just, you need sleep, then you're just not really thinking about it. So then you notice a lot of snoring. So it's just a couple of things to keep in mind of what can, you know, come about from lack of sleep.

And just, you know, obviously if you need something, you know, do what you can for you, but don't be afraid to get professional help if needed.

[Tom Faust]

Yeah. Especially if it's some of the more serious types of sleep problems, like, you know, narcolepsy, if you're falling asleep just out of the blue someplace, that's something to go find treatment for. If you're having, you know, sleepwalking, find yourself sleepwalking or night terrors, go get some help.

Find help for these things. Each of these disorders has, you know, distinct characteristics that require specific interventions. So you definitely want to talk with a healthcare professional if you're having these kinds of issues.

[Chris Faust]

Yeah. Keeping awareness of these things will also help too. It's like, you know, you might not have it, but if you start noticing that you're, you know, starting to not feel normal, you know,

just, you know, we're trying just hopefully bring some awareness of things to, you know, that can happen and what can be done with it.

[Tom Faust]

And so with that, I think that we've covered everything we need to cover in this one. Like in previous episodes of this, we will include an FAQ with some questions and answers that, that, you know, provide a little more information than what we've shared here. And I think other than that, that's it, Chris.

[Chris Faust]

Yeah, no. All I can think of right now, but, you know, as always, we appreciate everyone, you know, appreciate you taking your time out to, you know, watch this, listen to this and, you know, whatever. And we always appreciate, you know, if you like the content, like, subscribe, you know, pass the information along to somebody because we're always just interested in getting the word out of things that, you know, people know about, but, you know, maybe they're just not thinking of, but they're actual real things that affect, you know, not only veterans, but everybody in general.

So, yeah, appreciate, you know, any word of mouth things that you do and your time for, for joining us and listening.

[Tom Faust]

All right. So on that note, we will see you next time.

[Chris Faust]

Catch you on the next one.