

Veterans'

WINTER • 2004

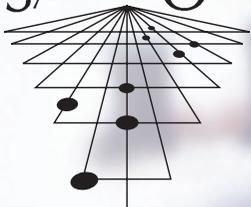
THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

Health

A shot at a
bug-free season

Helping
your loved
one overcome
post-traumatic
stress disorder

VA Healthcare
System of Ohio





To our readers

We hope you've enjoyed the holiday season in good health. As we move into the new year, we continue our commitment to providing current information that will help you make smart decisions about your well-being. In this issue of *Veterans' Health*, we offer advice to help you stay well through winter, including home-safety suggestions and flu-fighting tips.

Best wishes for a safe and healthy new year!

—Clyde Parkis, Network Director



About our mailing list

We make every effort to ensure our mailing lists are accurate.

If you have questions or would like to be added to or deleted from the list, let us know. Please include your entire address. To make a change, you *must* mail the mailing panel to:

Veterans' Health

VA Healthcare System of Ohio
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Veterans' Health is back online at www.va.gov/visn10/. Visit this site to view back issues or subscribe.

Winterize your skin

When the temperature outside goes down and you turn up the heat inside, your skin starts to suffer. Windy days, forced-air heating and high indoor temperatures cause skin to lose moisture to the air. This results in dryness, cracking and itching, especially on the face, hands and legs. Here are some simple steps you can take to counter the effects of winter on your skin:

- Drink eight glasses of water a day to help keep your skin hydrated.
- Shorten the length of your shower and turn down the water temperature.
- Add a humidifier or place pans of water near heat ducts or radiators if the air in your house is dry.
- Use a heavier skin lotion or skin moisturizer such as Keri or Nivea.
- Apply lotion or cream to your skin while it's still damp for the greatest benefit.
- Apply a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 to your face, your neck and the backs of your hands when outdoors. **VA**

At-home safety tips

Taking the right precautions can see you safely through the winter months. Prepare yourself for the change in weather with these at-home tips:

- Keep smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in working order and know the signs of carbon monoxide poisoning: nausea, dizziness, headache, fatigue and shortness of breath.
- Place doormats at entryways to prevent slippery floors.
- Store a first-aid kit, a radio, a flashlight, batteries and a supply of bottled water and nonsalty canned food or food mixes.
- Ask your utility company about services available to power-dependent customers during blackouts.
- Use space heaters with extreme care and caution. They cause many fires.
- Set your thermostat to at least 65°.
- Have your heating system, chimney and flue checked each year. **VA**

Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 21 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

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A shot at a bug-free season

If you're like most Americans, expect to get as many as four colds this winter. Although a cold may seem like more of a nuisance than anything, as you get older you have a higher risk for developing more serious infections such as sinusitis, pneumonia and influenza (the flu).

Conquering colds

A cold is a viral infection of the upper respiratory tract. Symptoms include a runny nose, sore throat, mild headaches or body aches, sneezing, coughing, red eyes and fever (less than 102°). See your healthcare provider if your cold doesn't get better within seven to 10 days, your symptoms worsen or you have a chronic respiratory condition. Antibiotics won't help, but over-the-counter cold medications may provide some relief.

Fighting the flu

The flu—a viral infection of the nose, throat and lungs—causes more than 36,000 deaths in the United States each year. Signs of the flu include



body aches, headaches, cough and high fever. See your healthcare provider right away if you have flu symptoms, especially if you are over 65, have a chronic health condition, have an impaired immune system, live in a nursing home or work in a healthcare facility. Taking a prescribed antiviral medication within 48 hours of the symptoms' onset may help.

Good nutrition and regular exercise can strengthen your immune system to fight infectious diseases, and frequent hand washing can keep germs at bay and help protect others. Annual flu shots will give you added protection. The VA expects to receive the entire order

of flu vaccines and will target the vaccination program to adults over 65 or at high risk and to those who may transmit the flu to someone at high risk. To learn more information, visit www.publichealth.va.gov. 

When to wash your hands

Wash up anytime your hands are visibly dirty as well as:

- before, during and after preparing or eating food
- after using the bathroom



- after handling animals or their waste
- after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose
- after changing a diaper (wash baby's hands, too)
- before and after treating wounds or attending to an ill person
- after handling garbage
- before inserting or removing contact lenses

Hand washing 101

Wet your hands with warm running water and apply liquid or clean bar soap. Lather well and rub your hands together vigorously for at least 10 to 15 seconds. Scrub your wrists, the backs of your hands, between your fingers and under your fingernails. Rinse well and dry with a clean or disposable towel.



A better tomorrow

Helping your loved one overcome post-traumatic stress disorder

When your child, spouse or loved one returns from combat in Afghanistan or Iraq, he or she may need more than a hearty hug and home-cooked meal for a welcome. About 30 percent of wartime veterans will come home suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—a condition that often occurs after life-threatening events such as military combat and terrorist attacks. You can help your loved one by learning to recognize PTSD and helping him or her get the right treatment early.

Recognize the symptoms

It can be difficult for you and your loved one who's just come home to know when to seek help.

“It’s not unusual for newly returned veterans to struggle with emotional issues as they adjust back to civilian life,” says Terry C. Washam, the Mental Health Care Line manager at Cleveland VA Medical Center and a Vietnam veteran. “But when one or more stress symptoms begin to interfere with family or social life, employment or education, intervention becomes necessary.”

Many people who have PTSD repeatedly relive their experiences in the form of flashbacks, nightmares or frightening thoughts. Other signs your loved one may be suffering from PTSD include:

- depression, anxiety or guilt
- withdrawal from family, friends and social events

- angry outbursts and inappropriate rage
- trouble sleeping
- nervousness
- problems concentrating
- use of drugs or alcohol to cope with the trauma experienced during combat

Left untreated, PTSD symptoms can last a lifetime.

Get the right treatment

“The earlier that veterans who have PTSD get care, the more likely that they can learn to manage their symptoms and go on to lead fulfilling lives,” says Washam.

Treatment at the VA begins with education. A series of **educational classes** may be all your loved one needs to cope with difficult memories and to better adjust. Many classes offered by your local VA medical center encourage family to come, too, so you can ask questions and better understand the problems your loved one is facing.

Group therapy is another useful tool for helping veterans understand and resolve traumas. In this setting, your loved one will share difficult experiences with and learn from peers. “Directly facing the grief, anxiety and guilt related to trauma helps many survivors cope with their symptoms and memories,” Washam says.

If your loved one doesn’t feel comfortable in a group setting or requires more extensive treatment, **one-on-one counseling** can help. A mental health professional will teach your loved one behavioral skills to cope with anxiety, manage anger, prepare for stress reactions and handle future traumatic events. If necessary, the professional will prescribe medication to ease



Call us

If your loved one is showing signs of PTSD, don’t wait to get help. Contact your local VA medical center or call the VA’s 24-hour, seven-day help line at **1-888-838-6446**. The VA is the leader in PTSD treatment, and VA Healthcare System of Ohio offers a number of programs to treat the disorder.

For additional help, contact Military One Source at **1-800-342-9647** to speak with a mental health professional who can answer your questions and help you find community support.

symptoms. And if your loved one has turned to drugs or alcohol, the professional will refer him or her to a VA expert trained in substance abuse.

“Even with treatment, your loved one may experience difficult moments throughout life,” says Washam. “But you can help your loved one understand that, with the right care, he or she can enjoy life again.” **VH**

Benefits for returning vets

VA offers a wide range of benefits for returning veterans, including medical and transition aid. Veterans who served on active duty in combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War or against a hostile force after November 11, 1998, are eligible for certain healthcare services for two years after their dates of discharge.

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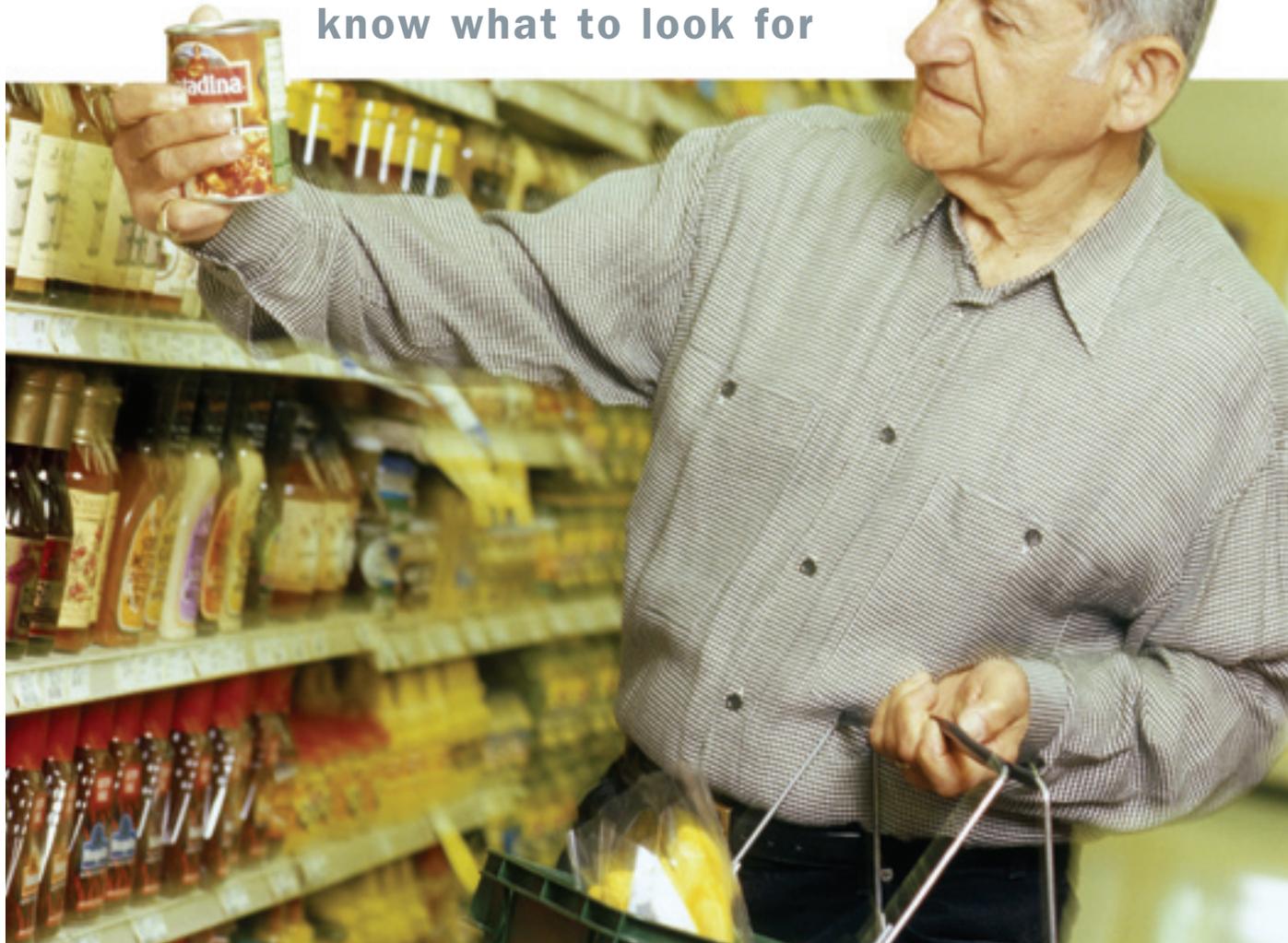
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Understanding food labels

To eat for better health, know what to look for



You're standing in the frozen food section of your supermarket, two TV dinners in hand. After a quick glance at the nutrition labels, you toss the beef dinner in your shopping cart. But do you really know what you're bringing home to eat?

"If you're concerned about your health or you just want to make the smartest food choices, learn to read labels when you shop," says Kari Arneson, a registered dietitian at the Chillicothe VA Medical Center.

A Nutrition Facts label tells you the nutrients foods contain, using U.S. Food and Drug

Administration (FDA) guidelines with the support of food manufacturers. Here's a simple guide to help you with what all those numbers mean.

Serving size

Serving size is the amount of food you need to eat to get the amount of listed calories and nutrients. The serving size may be measured in cups or pieces (such as two cookies) and includes the serving's metric equivalent.

Servings per container

These are based on the suggested serving size.

Calories

Be careful—this section tells you the amount of calories *per serving*, not per package.

Calories from fat

These are the number of calories per serving that come from fat. The FDA recommends you get no more than 30 percent of your daily calories from fat. For a 2,000-calorie-a-day diet, no more than 600 calories should come from fat.

Total fat

Saturated fat, unsaturated fat and trans fat may be listed separately. Pay careful attention to the amount of saturated fat and trans fat. Both can raise cholesterol and increase your risk for heart disease and other illnesses. “Eat no more than 20 grams of saturated fat a day and keep your trans fat intake as low as possible,” says Arneson. After January 2006, all food labels will list the amount of trans fat per serving. If your label doesn’t, check the ingredients. Avoid processed foods made with partially hydrogenated vegetable oil such as vegetable shortening, some margarines and baked goods.

Cholesterol

The body needs some cholesterol, but too much can cause plaque buildup in your arteries and lead to stroke or heart attack. You don’t have to eat any food that contains cholesterol since your liver makes all that you need. Arneson recommends keeping cholesterol in your diet between 200 and 300 milligrams (mg) a day.

Sodium

Stay under 2,400 mg for the day. If you’ve been told by your primary care provider to restrict salt in your diet or if you have high blood pressure or a heart condition, you may need to consume even less, says Arneson.

Total carbohydrate

The FDA recommends you get 60 percent of your daily calories from carbohydrates, your main energy source. The total is broken down into grams of dietary fiber and sugar. Arneson recommends you strive to get 25–30 grams a day of dietary fiber—which helps you lose weight, lower your cholesterol and control your blood glucose.

Protein

The FDA recommends you get 10 percent of your daily calories from protein-rich foods such as eggs, milk products, meats, fish and dried beans.

Vitamins and minerals

At the bottom of the label are percent daily values for vitamins A and C, calcium and iron. If you tend to fall short on calcium, checking labels is a great way to stay on target. “Aim for 100 percent of these nutrients each day,” says Arneson. Other vitamins may be listed.

At the bottom

Here, you’ll see the requirements and daily limits for both 2,000- and 2,500-calorie-a-day diets. The label also shows how many calories are in one gram of fat, carbohydrate and protein. **VH**

Keeping a food diary

Whether you’re trying to lose weight or just improve your health, using a food diary can help you, says Kari Arneson, R.D., Chillicothe VA Medical Center. Arneson recommends you keep a diary for three to seven days, using a small pad you can tuck in your pocket or purse. For each day:

- **Write down every bite.** Include candies grabbed on the run.
- **Write as you bite** (so you don’t forget later).
- **Read food labels** to record calories and other key nutrition information.
- **Be specific.** Don’t just write “hamburger”—include the ketchup, mayonnaise and bun.
- **Record the time of day you’re eating.** This helps you be more aware of when you get hungry so you can prevent overeating.
- **Record your mood.** If you eat when you’re stressed, you can learn healthier ways to release tension, such as taking a brisk walk.

Afterward, review your diary and note areas you’d like to improve, such as eating less fat, more vegetables or fewer sugary items. A registered dietitian at your local VA medical center also can review your diary and suggest ways you can make better food choices.



Reaching us is easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

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