

Veterans'

WINTER • 2011

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

Health

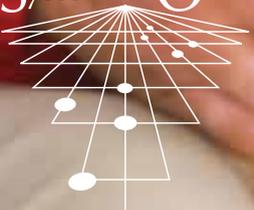


**Understanding
diabetes risks**

**Keeping a
healthy outlook
for the holidays**

**Avoiding
high blood pressure**

VA Healthcare
System of Ohio



To our readers

Welcome to your winter issue of *Veterans' Health*.

As we approach the holidays, it's important to maintain a



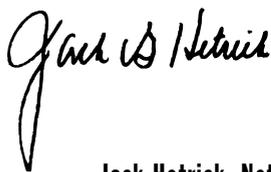
happy and healthy outlook. This time of year lends itself to high stress levels, indulging in tempting, high fat foods and even depression.

On pages 4 and 5, we offer advice on how to deal with holiday pitfalls that we don't even notice.

Page 6 provides information about high blood pressure and tips on how to control and or prevent it.

As we say goodbye to 2011 and ring in the new year, over indulging in alcohol becomes a huge concern. Page 7 gives us great guidelines to ensure we all have a safe holiday season.

Best wishes to all of our Veterans for a healthy and happy new year!



— Jack Hetrick, Network Director

About our mailing list

We make every effort to ensure our mailing list is 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:

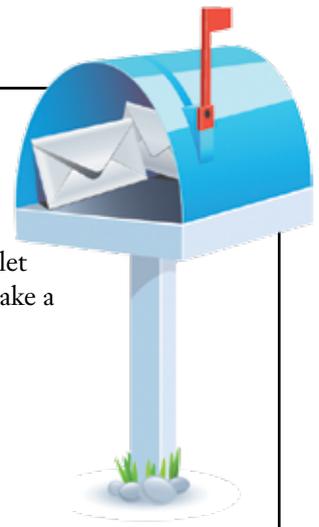
Veterans' Health

VA Healthcare System of Ohio Network Office

11500 Northlake Drive

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Are you receiving your benefits?

Your military service may be worth more than you think. You may qualify for help with health care, education, a new-home loan and other benefits. This includes direct financial aid.

Did you serve in the Persian Gulf War or after Oct. 7, 2001? If so, you may be eligible for the Ohio Veterans Bonus Program. The Ohio Department of Veterans Services wants to connect you to what you've earned. Contact the County Veterans Service Network at **1-877-OHIO VET (1-877-644-6838)**. Visit dvs.ohio.gov. You can find your county office or apply for benefits online.

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 health care 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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Understanding the risks of diabetes

Diabetes takes a toll on your body if it's not managed. Taking care of yourself and your diabetes can help you feel better. It may help you avoid these health problems caused by diabetes.

- **Atherosclerosis** causes arteries to narrow. This raises your risk of high blood pressure (also see page 6), chest pain, heart attack and stroke. Most people who have diabetes die from some form of heart or blood vessel disease.
- **Diabetic neuropathy** is nerve damage. Diabetic neuropathy may cause tingling, numbness and loss of feeling in the hands, arms, feet or legs. It can also affect organs such as your kidneys and lead to kidney failure.
- **Skin sores (ulcers)** can occur on feet. Poor circulation and nerve damage make it harder to treat skin sores. The sores can worsen quickly and lead to toe, foot or leg amputation.
- **Eye diseases** are more common in people who have diabetes. This includes retinopathy, cataracts and glaucoma.

Keeping your blood sugar in control can prevent problems. If problems do occur, prompt treatment leads to better outcomes.



Keep track of your health

You can view all of your test results by joining My HealthVet at www.myhealth.va.gov.

- View current and past chemistry and hematology **LABS + TESTS** results online. Use the Blue Button to download, save or print your information.
- Enter and track blood sugar levels with the **VITALS + READINGS** feature. View your entries in a table or graph format.
- Use *Secure Messaging* to share health information and communicate online with your VA health care team.

Teleretinal imaging for diabetic retinopathy

Diabetic retinopathy is a leading cause of vision loss. Stay on top of your vision. Have your eyes checked often. The VA provides a special eye screening test for people with diabetes called teleretinal imaging. Cameras are used to take images of your retina.

Benefits of teleretinal screening:

- completed in 30 minutes
- done without dilating your eyes
- digitally recorded in your medical record

If problems are found, you will need a dilated eye exam.



4 holiday heart dangers

Choose your indulgences wisely

The holiday season is fast approaching and so is an increased risk for heart attack. From November through January, more people die from heart attacks than at any other time of the year, according to Duke University researchers. Avoid these four seasonal pitfalls:

1 Too much food and too little exercise. A little splurge on special occasions is OK. But don't entirely abandon your healthy lifestyle. Substitute low fat or nonfat yogurt for mayonnaise in dips and dressings. Replace some of the bread in your stuffing recipe with chopped vegetables. Put on your sneakers and head for the mall to do some holiday speed-shopping!

2 Too much alcohol and smoke exposure. Drinking too much alcohol can raise the level of certain fats in the blood. It can increase your risk of high blood pressure, alcoholism, obesity, stroke, suicide and accidents. More parties during the holidays may mean more exposure to secondhand smoke. Secondhand smoke is linked to heart disease.

3 Stress and anxiety. Family, traveling, shopping, cooking and parties during the holidays can make it seem impossible to relax. Plus, there's added financial stress this time of year. Stress may contribute to high blood pressure. It's important to head off stress. Try relaxation techniques like deep breathing or a yoga class. Learn to accept your limits.

4 Exposure to germs. Crowded malls, school plays, indoor parties, visiting relatives: It's no surprise that colds and flu are more common during the winter months. People with heart disease are at an increased risk for dying of flu complications so get a flu shot! Cut your risk by washing your hands often, getting enough sleep and making sure other family members are up to date on their vaccinations. Some cold medicines, such as decongestants, can raise your blood pressure. If you have high blood pressure, check with your doctor or pharmacist before buying over the counter drugs.



Better health is just a click away

Track what you eat and drink and record your exercise routine on MyHealthVet. It's fast and easy! Register online at **www.myhealth.va.gov**. The Food and Activity Journals include printable daily worksheets to record your entries.

Use the **VITALS + READINGS** feature to enter and track your body weight. You can view your weight changes in a table or graph format. Access links to help calculate body mass index and learn more about weight-related health risks.



Making the holidays happy

The most wonderful time of the year? Not to people who describe the holidays as high tension and high obligation. A 2008 holiday stress poll by the American Psychological Association showed that more than 8 out of 10 Americans expect stress during the holiday season. Still, it's possible to recapture the meaning of the holidays.

- **Don't worry about being perfect.** Dashed expectations can cause a holiday crash, so keep them reasonable.
- **Stay healthy.** Holiday season is an open invitation to de-stress the wrong way. Too much food and drink and too little sleep can take a toll. So be mindful of your mental and physical well being.
- **Go with the flow.** Holiday traditions evolve over the years. While you may be disappointed if you can't quite reenact your celebrations of yore, find pleasure in creating and sharing new traditions.
- **Make room for sadness.** Or loneliness. Sometimes unpleasant memories or the loss of a loved one puts a damper on the season. Jot those feelings down in a journal or confide in a close friend. Take solace in religious rites or community events you find significant.
- **Accept family members for who they are.** Holiday gatherings aren't the time to refuel arguments or rehash differences. Instead, cherish the opportunity to be together.
- **De-emphasize the material.** Give more gifts that don't come off a store shelf: Offer to babysit for family, make a homemade gift or take loved ones to the museum. And make it known that you don't expect expensive gifts yourself.

Take control of high blood pressure

As many as 76.4 million Americans have high blood pressure, also known as hypertension. High blood pressure means that blood travels through arteries at a pressure too high for good health. This disease can strike anyone.

Understanding the risks

A temporary rise in blood pressure is a normal response to stress or physical exertion. But blood pressure should not be high when you are at rest. High blood pressure can result in blocked arteries, which can lead to a heart attack. Left untreated, high blood pressure can result in stroke, heart failure, kidney damage and other health problems.

Why it's dangerous

Over time, uncontrolled high blood pressure makes the heart muscle grow larger and less efficient. Arteries become less elastic, making them likely to harden and clog. Narrowed vessels slow down circulation so tissues and organs may not get enough blood. Your kidneys help regulate blood pressure;

if they don't get enough blood, high blood pressure may worsen. Damaged vessels also make it easier for clots to form, which can cause a heart attack or stroke.

High blood pressure is known as the “silent killer” because often there are no symptoms. About 30 percent of Americans don't even know they have the disease, according to the American Heart Association. For thousands of people every year, the first sign of the condition is a heart attack or stroke. But, high blood pressure is easy for doctors to detect and treat successfully. To reduce your risk or avoid danger from unknown or untreated high blood pressure, follow these steps:

STEP 1: Get your blood pressure checked

Unlike other diseases that cause pain, swelling or fevers, high blood pressure won't alert you to its presence. The likelihood of having high blood pressure increases as you age. So it's important to have your blood pressure checked regularly.

STEP 2: Change dangerous habits

While high blood pressure can't be cured, making certain changes in behavior and activities can control or prevent it:

- Cut down on salt.
- Exercise often.
- Limit alcohol.
- Get to or maintain a normal weight.
- Stop smoking.

STEP 3: Take prescribed medications

When changes in lifestyle don't lower blood pressure, doctors may prescribe one or more medications. To be effective, these drugs must be taken as prescribed. Don't skip doses, change doses or stop taking your medicine without talking to your doctor first.





Safe holidays

Family parties, gift exchanges with friends, New Year's events no matter where you celebrate, always watch how much alcohol you drink. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reported 10,839 drunk-driving road deaths in 2009. NHTSA reports that from Christmas through New Year's Day 40 percent of all deaths happen where one driver was drunk.

Moderation is key

If you do drink alcohol, do so in moderation. Women shouldn't have more than one drink a day and men no more than two drinks a day. Binge drinking should be avoided as well. Women and adults age 65 and older shouldn't have more than three drinks on one occasion. Men shouldn't have more than four drinks on one occasion.

One drink is equal to:

- 12 ounces regular beer
- 8 or 9 ounces malt liquor
- 5 ounces table wine
- 1.5 ounces 80 proof hard liquor

Drinking small quantities of alcohol doesn't cause serious health problems. But too much, too often can lead to health problems such as liver damage.

The following people shouldn't drink alcohol:

- children and teenagers
- people of any age who can't limit their drinking to the recommended levels
- pregnant women or women who plan to become pregnant
- those who plan to drive, operate machines or take part in other activities that require attention, skill or coordination
- people who take certain medications that interact with alcohol
- people with certain medical conditions
- people recovering from alcohol dependence (alcoholism)

If you're worried about how much you'll drink before a party, designate a driver. If you're hosting a party, offer nonalcoholic choices. And, don't let guests who've had too much to drink drive themselves home.

Alcohol dependence can be successfully treated with the following therapies:

- group treatment
- inpatient or residential treatment
- medications to reduce cravings or prevent relapse
- personal counseling

Talk to your VA health care team about VA resources that can help.



Reaching us is easy

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

Northeastern Ohio

Wade Park VAMC
10701 E. Blvd.
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-791-3800

Akron Annex
95 W. Waterloo Road
Akron, OH 44319
330-724-7715

Akron CBOC
55 W. Waterloo Road
Akron, OH 44319
330-724-7715

Canton CBOC
733 Market Ave. S.
Canton, OH 44702
330-489-4600

East Liverpool CBOC
15655 state Route 170,
Suite A
East Liverpool, OH 43920
330-386-4303

Lorain CBOC
205 W. 20th St.
Lorain, OH 44052
440-244-3833

Mansfield CBOC
1456 Park Ave. W., Suite N
Mansfield, OH 44906
419-529-4602

McCafferty CBOC
4242 Lorain Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44113
216-939-0699

New Philadelphia CBOC
1260 Monroe Ave.,
Suite 1A
New Philadelphia, OH 44663
330-602-5339

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7 W. Jackson St.
Painesville, OH 44077
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Painesville MH CBOC
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Painesville, OH 44077
440-357-6740

Parma CBOC
8701 Brookpark Road
Parma, OH 44129
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330-296-3641

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Sandusky, OH 44870
419-625-7350

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Warren, OH 44485
330-392-0311

Youngstown CBOC
2031 Belmont Ave.
Youngstown, OH 44505
330-740-9200

Southeastern Ohio

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17273 state Route 104
Chillicothe, OH 45601
740-773-1141 or 1-800-358-8262

Athens CBOC
510 W. Union St., Suite B
Athens, OH 45701
740-593-7314

Cambridge CBOC
2146 Southgate Parkway
Cambridge, OH 43725
740-432-1963

Lancaster CBOC
1550 Sheridan Drive, Suite 100
Collonade Medical Building
Lancaster, OH 43130
740-653-6145

Marietta CBOC
418 Colegate Drive
Marietta, OH 45750
740-568-0412

Portsmouth CBOC
840 Gallia St.
Portsmouth, OH 45662
740-353-3236

Wilmington Outreach Clinic
448 W. Main St.
Wilmington, OH 45177
937-382-3949

Southwestern Ohio area

Cincinnati VAMC
3200 Vine St.
Cincinnati, OH 45220
513-861-3100 or 1-888-267-7873

Bellevue, KY CBOC
103 Landmark Drive, 3rd Floor
Bellevue, KY 41073
859-392-3840

Brown County Outreach Clinic
4903 state Route 125
Georgetown, OH 45121
937-378-3413

Clermont County CBOC
4600 Beechwood Road
Cincinnati, OH 45244
513-943-3680

Dearborn, IN CBOC
1600 Flossie Drive
Greendale, IN 47025
812-539-2313

Florence, KY CBOC
7711 Ewing Blvd.
Florence, KY 41042
859-282-4480

Hamilton CBOC
1750 South Erie Highway
Hamilton, OH 45011
513-870-9444

Western Ohio area

Dayton VAMC
4100 W. Third St.
Dayton, OH 45428
937-268-6511

Lima CBOC
1303 Bellefontaine Ave.
Lima, OH 45804
419-222-5788

Middletown CBOC
4337 N. Union Road
Middletown, OH 45005
513-423-8387

Richmond, IN CBOC
4351 S. A St.
Richmond, IN 47374
765-973-6915

Springfield CBOC
512 S. Burnett Road
Springfield, OH 45505
937-328-3385

Central Ohio

Columbus VAACC
420 N. James Road
Columbus, OH 43219
614-257-5200

Grove City CBOC
1955 Ohio Drive
Grove City, OH 43123
614-257-5800

Marion CBOC
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Corporate Center #2
Marion, OH 43302
740-223-8809

Newark CBOC
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Newark, OH 43055
740-788-8329

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