

SPRING 2015

Veterans' Health

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

Your heart: Get the facts

Take these steps to
protect your back

Use MOVE! to lose

VA Healthcare
System of Ohio





To our readers

Spring is here, bringing warmer temperatures and more opportunities to enjoy outdoor activities. If you're looking to make a fresh start, take a look inside *Veterans' Health*. This issue is full of useful health and wellness information.



Did you know that exposure to Agent Orange may lead to type 2 diabetes? See page 3 to learn if you may be eligible for VA benefits and what you need to know about type 2 diabetes.

We provide an in-depth look at the heart, starting on page 4. Learn about this remarkable organ, how it works, some common diseases of the heart, as well as tips to keep your ticker in tip-top shape!

Our series on back health and spine health continues on pages 8 and 9. Here you'll find important tips to prevent injuries and keep your back healthy whether you're at home or on the go.

On page 10, A VISN 10 Veteran shares his success story about how he lost weight, gained strength and stopped taking blood pressure and cholesterol medicines through VA's MOVE! program.

Use MyHealthVet Secure Messaging to contact your health care team. Read the article on page 11 to learn how you can benefit from this interactive health assessment tool.

We're committed to providing you and your loved ones with the best health care possible.

Jack W Hetrick

— 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:

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Need addresses and phone numbers to VISN 10 VA sites?

Try the Internet!
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What empowers you?
Pass it on!



The Ohio Women Veterans Conference

Aladdin Shrine Center ~ Columbus, Ohio
Saturday, Sept. 12, 2015

Registration: 8 am - 9 am | Conference: 9 am - 4 pm

See www.ohiovet.gov/womenvets

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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Agent Orange and type 2 diabetes

Were you exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides during your military service? If you were and you later developed type 2 diabetes, you are eligible to receive VA health care and disability compensation.

What is type 2 diabetes?

Diabetes is a chronic disease that affects how well the body is able to use blood sugar. With type 2 diabetes, the body does not produce enough insulin. Or, the body's cells ignore the insulin that is produced. Symptoms of type 2 diabetes include:

- blurry vision
- excessive thirst
- fatigue
- hunger
- frequent urination
- weight loss

Risk factors for type 2 diabetes include:

- **Race:** African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans and Asian Americans are at greater risk for developing the disease.
- **Age:** People ages 45 and older are at greater risk for type 2 diabetes.
- **Family history:** Your risk for the disease increases if a parent or sibling has type 2 diabetes.
- **Inactive lifestyle:** The less active you are, the more likely you are to develop type 2 diabetes. Being active helps your body use up stored glucose (sugar) and become more sensitive to insulin.
- **Prediabetes:** A condition in which your blood sugar is higher than normal. If not treated, prediabetes may lead to type 2 diabetes.
- **Weight:** Being overweight or obese is a primary risk factor for type 2 diabetes.
- **Gestational diabetes:** Women who developed gestational diabetes during pregnancy or gave birth to an infant weighing more than 9 pounds are at greater risk of developing the disease.



Help yourself: Prevent type 2 diabetes

Work on losing extra pounds. Being overweight is the single biggest risk factor for type 2 diabetes. Be active at least 30 minutes a day; every 10 minutes counts. Eat a low-fat, high-fiber diet. Learn more about healthy living. **VH**

Agent Orange: Learn more about VA benefits

Veterans with qualifying service in Vietnam or in the Korean demilitarized zone are presumed to have been exposed. If you believe you were exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides during your military service, you can request an Agent Orange Registry Exam. You may qualify for health care and compensation. Surviving spouses and dependents may be eligible for survivors' benefits.



Your heart: What you need

Your heart is vital to your health and nearly everything that goes on inside your body. It pumps blood to all parts of your body. Blood carries the oxygen and nutrients that your organs need to work well. Blood also carries carbon dioxide (a waste product) to your lungs so you can breathe it out. Without the heart's pumping action, blood would not get to the body tissues that need it. Without a blood supply, body tissues would die.

A healthy heart supplies your body with the right amount of blood at the rate needed to work well. If disease or injury weakens your heart, your body's organs won't get enough blood to work normally.

Heart and blood circulation

The organ: The heart is a muscular organ the size of your fist and weighs about 10.5 ounces. It's located in the center of the chest under your ribcage between your lungs. The heart is at the center of a circulatory system that pumps your blood to and from all areas of your body. The heart beats between 60 and 100 beats per minute. In one day, the hearts beats between 86,400 and 144,000 times.

The pump: Your heart has a left side and a right side. Each side has a top chamber and a bottom chamber. These chambers fill up with blood. When the heart muscles squeeze down, this causes your heart to pump—or “beat.” This



to know

squeezing action forces the blood out into another part of your heart or into arteries. Then the heart muscle relaxes and blood flows into the empty chambers again. If you listen to your heart with a stethoscope, you hear two sounds: “lub-DUB.” That’s because the top parts of your heart beat just before the bottom part.

The top chamber collects blood and squeezes it into the bottom chamber. When the bottom chamber squeezes down, the blood is pushed out to the body or into the lungs. The blood makes two circuits—one from the right side of the heart to the lungs (where it gets oxygen) and back—and the other from the left side of the heart to the body

(where it feeds the body’s tissues) and back. Special valves in your heart ensure that blood flows in the right direction. When the top and bottom parts of the heart work together, there is just enough blood pumped out to your body to meet its needs.

The circulatory system: The circulatory system is like a highway that is made up of hose-like roads, called blood vessels, carrying blood. The two larger “roads” in the system are arteries and veins. The smaller side roads are the arterioles, capillaries and venules. The arteries fill with oxygen-rich blood and take blood away from the left side of the heart to deliver it to the body. As arteries travel further from your heart, they divide into the smaller vessels called arterioles, and they continue to divide into even smaller vessels called capillaries. The capillaries deliver the oxygen and nutrients to body tissues and pick up the carbon dioxide and waste products. Then they join into larger vessels called venules, which join together to become veins. Veins bring the blood, which now lacks oxygen, back to the heart to begin the cycle all over again. Blood circulates through the body three times per minute or 4,320 times in one day.

How the heart works

To work well, your heart needs:

- 1. Signals from your nervous system to tell it when to squeeze, how hard to squeeze and how fast to beat.** When you are working hard, your heart needs to speed up. When you are resting, your heart slows down. Nerve signals change heartbeats to meet your needs.
- 2. Strong heart muscles that squeeze down when they get a nerve signal.** Like all muscles in your body, heart muscles need exercise to stay in shape. Aerobic exercise makes your heart work harder and stronger.
- 3. Adequate blood supply to the heart muscles to give them oxygen.** Because the heart muscles work so hard, they need a special

...continued on page 6



Continued from page 5...

blood supply. These heart blood vessels are called coronary arteries.

4. Healthy blood vessels all over your body. The heart has to force blood through 60,000 miles of blood vessels with each beat. The pressure needed to move your blood is called your blood pressure. Blood vessels need to expand to carry the blood pumped out by the heart. If the blood vessels are too “hard,” and do not expand, your heart has to pump with a higher pressure.

What is heart disease?

Heart disease is the No. 1 one cause of death in the United States for both men and women. Heart disease includes a number of problems that affect the heart and the blood vessels in the heart, such as:

- **Coronary artery disease (CAD) is the most common type of heart disease.** It is the leading cause of heart attacks. When you have CAD, your heart arteries become hard and narrow from cholesterol and fat. Blood has a hard time getting to the heart, so the heart does not get all the blood it needs to work. CAD can lead to:
 - **Angina (an-JEYE-nuh).** Angina is chest pain or discomfort that happens when the heart does not get enough blood. It may feel like a pressing or squeezing pain, often in the chest, but

sometimes the pain is in the shoulders, arms, jaw or back. It can also feel like indigestion (upset stomach). Angina is not a heart attack, but having angina means you are more likely to have a heart attack.

- **Heart attack.** A heart attack occurs when an artery is severely or completely blocked, and the heart does not get the blood it needs for more than 20 minutes. When a part of the heart doesn't have blood, some heart muscle may die. The muscles around the lost muscle have to work harder; they are not as strong as before the heart attack. If enough muscle dies, the heart will stop beating.

- **Heart failure** occurs when the heart is not able to pump blood through the body as well as it should. It does not mean that the heart stops. It means that other organs, which normally get blood from the heart, do not get enough blood. Heart muscles can be weakened by a heart attack or by high blood pressure. When the heart muscles don't pump hard enough, the blood will move slowly through your blood vessels. If this happens, some fluids may leak out of the blood vessels into surrounding tissues. This causes swelling—usually where the blood is farthest from your heart. Signs of heart failure include:
 1. Swelling (fluid) in feet, ankles and legs.
 2. Shortness of breath (feeling like you can't get enough air) due to fluid in the lungs.

3. Extreme tiredness. When your body does not get enough oxygen, you feel weaker.

- **Heart arrhythmias (uh-RITH-mee-uhz)** are changes in the heart's rhythm. They happen because the nerve signals change. This can happen for many reasons, including caffeine, drugs and heart attacks. Most people feel dizzy, faint, out of breath or have chest pains. These changes in heartbeat are harmless for most people. As you get older, you are more likely to have arrhythmias. Don't panic if you have a few flutters or if your heart races once in a while. If you have flutters and other symptoms such as dizziness or shortness of breath, call 911 right away.

- **Heart valve disease:** Heart valves that are not strong enough may allow blood to flow the wrong way or at the wrong time in the heartbeat. An example is mitral prolapse.

5 heart-healthy tips

To keep your heart healthy and reduce your risk of heart disease, try these tips:

1. Follow a healthy diet to keep your arteries clear of fats and cholesterol. A healthy diet includes a variety of vegetables and fruits. Avoid foods with saturated fats and trans fats.
2. If you smoke, make an effort to quit. Smoking narrows the arteries. It also causes cholesterol to cling to the inside of the arteries, making them even narrower.
3. If you're overweight or obese, try to lose weight. Extra weight causes extra work for your heart because you have to have longer blood vessels to take blood to the fat cells. Extra weight also can lead to increased fat clogging your arteries.
4. Be physically active. The activity strengthens your heart muscle. Exercise for 30 minutes most days. Every 10 minutes count.
5. Avoid using illegal drugs. Drugs can "poison" the heart by causing arrhythmias or weakening the heart muscle. **VH**

How to take your pulse

When your heart pumps blood through your arteries, it creates a pulse that you can feel on the arteries close to the skin's surface. For example, you can feel the pulse on the artery inside of your wrist, below your thumb.

You can count how many times your heart beats by taking your pulse. You will need a watch with a second hand.

To find your pulse, gently place your index and middle fingers on the artery located on the inner wrist of either arm, below your thumb. You should feel a pulsing or tapping against your fingers.

Watch the second hand and count the number of pulses you feel in 30 seconds. Double that number to find out your heart rate or pulse for 1 minute.

The usual resting pulse for an adult is 60 to 100 beats per minute. To find your resting pulse, count your pulse after you have been sitting or resting quietly for at least 10 minutes.



Part two of a two-part series

Back health and spine safety

In the winter 2014 edition, *Veterans' Health* gave an overview of the spine, and some general tips for back health. If you'd like a copy of this information, you can find it online at www.veteranshealthlibrary.org.



About spinal cord injuries (SCIs)

Each year, about 11,000 spinal cord injuries occur in the United States.

Motor vehicle mishaps are a major cause of SCIs in people age 65 and younger. Falls are a major cause of SCIs in people over age 65. SCIs from a sports injury most often occur in those under age 29. These injuries can have a profound effect on a person's life. **Preventing spinal cord injuries is key!**



Prevent motor vehicle accidents

Richard Petty has led the charge on our Veterans' Safe Driving Initiative. He has sponsored these key messages:

1. Do not drink or drive under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
2. Do not ride with an impaired driver.
3. Always wear your seat belt.
4. Always wear a helmet when riding a motorcycle.



Prevent falls

1. Install grab bars in the shower and tub.
2. Place a non-slip mat on the tub and shower floor.
3. Secure handrails on stairs and use them.
4. Get rid of throw rugs or secure them to the floor.
5. Wear sturdy shoes; make sure slippers have non-slip soles.
6. Keep floors clear of clutter.



Sports and recreation

Eighteen percent of all SCIs are related to sports or recreation.

Always wear a helmet when doing these activities:

- Riding a bike, motorcycle, skateboard or scooter.
- Skiing, snowboarding, horseback riding, rollerblading or skating.

When you're at the swimming pool:

- Avoid diving headfirst; enter "feet first."
- Know the water depth.
- Do not drink and dive (half of all diving injuries occur when alcohol is involved).

Trampoline injuries are on the rise:

- Trained supervision should be present to train and spot.
- Jumping surface should be placed near ground level.
- Supporting bars should be well padded.
- Only one person should use at a time.
- Amateurs should not attempt high-risk maneuvers like flips.

Firearm safety is important: Firearms are the second largest cause of SCIs.

- Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.
- Never point a firearm at anyone; always point the firearm in a safe direction.
- Keep the action open and the gun unloaded until you are ready to use it.
- Keep your finger off the trigger and outside of the trigger guard until ready to shoot.
- Store firearms unloaded and in a locked box; keep ammunition separate.
- Never climb a tree, cross a fence, jump a ditch or prop a loaded firearm.
- Wear 1,000 square inches of blaze orange when hunting.



About back injuries

Back injuries cost the United States about \$50 billion a year in lost days of work. There is no evidence proving that back belts protect your back. Lifting objects that are below your knees or above your shoulders are more strenuous on your back. Whether you are on the job or working around the house or yard, do what you can to protect your back from injury.

Tips for lifting and reaching:

- Use a step stool when reaching for objects above your shoulders.
- Do not reach for an object unless you are sure you are strong enough to lift it.
- Do not bend over an object to lift it. Bend your knees and squat in front of it. Lift slowly using your arm and leg muscles. Do not pull up with your back!
- Use a dolly when you can instead of carrying something heavy.
- Be mindful of the safe lifting zone: place objects to be lifted in the range above your knees and below your shoulder levels.

Backpacks: When backpacks are too heavy or poorly packed, back and neck injuries can happen.

- Always use both shoulder straps. Wide, padded straps are best.
- Do not over fill the backpack.
- Use good lifting techniques when picking up a backpack to put on.
- The bottom of the backpack should rest in the curve of the lower back; it should not hang more than 4 inches below your waistline.
- Children should not carry more than 15 percent of their body weight in a backpack.

Understanding back health and spine safety is important in preventing injuries and disabilities. Back pain is preventable when you use healthy habits that keep your back in good condition. You can make better decisions about how you go about everyday activities and avoid life-changing injury by being aware of actions that put your spine at risk.

Everyday tips for back health

- Use good posture.
- Stretch often.
- Exercise regularly.

Healthy choices for a healthy back

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Manage your stress.
- Do not smoke. **VH**

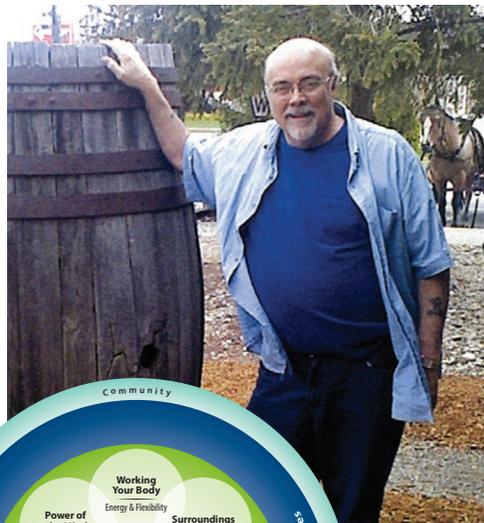


Dallas Hembree uses MOVE! to lose weight

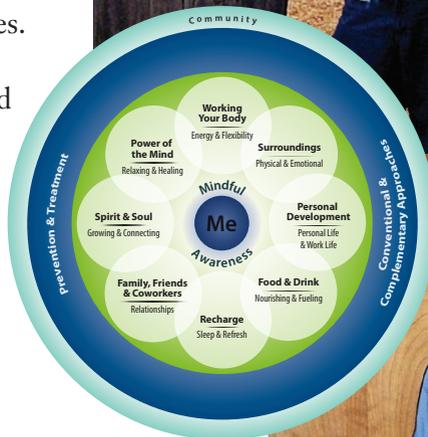
Like so many people, I enjoy eating and I'm not always as active as I should be. My weight kept creeping up after I got married, then I quit smoking and gained 60 pounds. After I retired, I found myself taking afternoon naps and spending too much time in front of the computer. I've been going to the Springfield, Ohio, Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) for several years and I'm pleased with the care they provide. At 65, I weighed 268 pounds and was on blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes medicines. One of my nurses at the Springfield VA clinic recommended I try the MOVE! program, so I did without success.

In fall 2013, I decided to try it again, doing the nutrition, exercise and the phone support (Tele-MOVE!) program. At first, things started slowly then I had to have my gallbladder removed in March 2014. It was during my time in the hospital and recovery that my appetite slowed down, so I took advantage by following what I learned about portion control and started cutting the size of my meals in half.

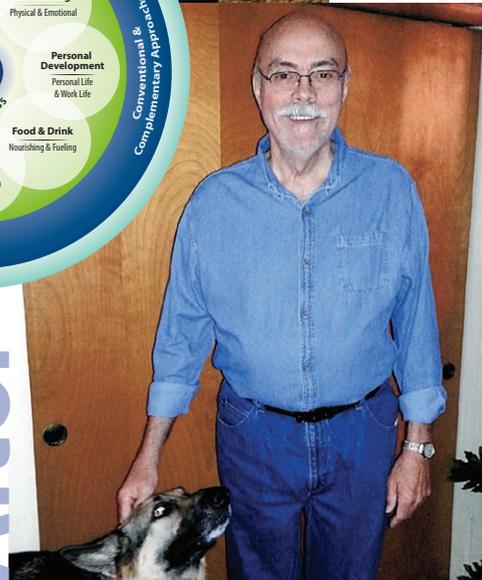
As I ate less, the weight started coming off. Regular calls from the MOVE! program helped me keep on track. And, I used resistance bands from the MOVE! Exercise program (Be Active and MOVE!) to work on my strength and mobility. By the end of August 2014 on my birthday, I'm proud to say I weighed in at 205 pounds. What a great gift to myself! I like telling people that my trick to weight loss is eating half as much and having a supportive Springfield VA team on my side. I've even learned to put half my food in a "to-go" box before eating at a restaurant—something I would have never done before! By the way, I'm off both my blood pressure and cholesterol meds and my diabetes meds have been decreased due to a much lower A1C. **VH**



Before



After



Personalized health care

VA is changing the conversation about health care with patient centered care. It starts by putting the Veteran and his or her goals, not a disease, at the center of care. To learn more about patient centered care, visit <http://www.va.gov/patientcenteredcare/>

Get 24/7 access online with Secure Messaging

Susan Speakman has been a primary care nurse at the Chillicothe VA medical center for 15 years. She knows that it can sometimes be difficult for a patient to reach her by phone. Waiting on hold and phone tag can be frustrating.

“Veterans can now use My HealthVet to send me a secure message,” said Susan. “They don’t have to call. They don’t have to worry. Patients can send a message in their own time, at their convenience.”

Susan’s patients are confident that she will take care of their prescription renewals or answer their questions about lab results. Patients sometimes send Susan their blood pressure in a secure message.



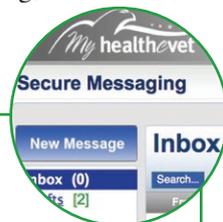
Susan Speakman, RN, Chillicothe VA medical center, says Secure Messaging is an easy way to keep in touch with patients.

Less traveling, easy access

For Army Veteran Charles Hamilton, secure messaging is better than the phone. “I can think about what I want to say in a message and review it before I send it. Then I have a record of Susan’s response.”

Secure Messaging has saved Charles a number of trips to the clinic. Once when he was experiencing pain, he used secure messaging to communicate his condition to his health care team. His doctor suggested that he cut back on one of his medications. After several weeks, the pain went away and a new medicine was prescribed. Charles did not need a CT scan or any other tests. All communications were handled through Secure Messaging.

“My HealthVet is a valuable tool that Veterans should be using. It gives you immediate 24/7 access. I have a closer relationship with my team because of secure messaging,” said Charles. **VH**



How to get Secure Messaging:

Register online for My HealthVet. Upgrade to a Premium account with in-person or online authentication. To learn more, visit www.myhealth.va.gov.

How to send a Secure Message:

1. Log on to My HealthVet. Select the **Secure Messaging** tab.
2. Select the **Open Secure Messaging** button.
3. Receive a notification when you get a secure message. Select the **Preferences** link at the upper right corner of the inbox. Enter a personal email address.

Note: Secure Messaging is not an emergency contact system. Please call 911 or go to your nearest medical center for emergency care.



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