

FALL 2015

Veterans' Health

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS



**Breathe in ... breathe out
Lung issues, allergies,
asthma and COPD**

Success with Telehealth

Help for caregivers

VA Healthcare
System of Ohio





To our readers

Everything is here! This is the time of year when we start thinking about the holidays, enjoying the company of family and friends—and scheduling flu and pneumonia shots.



This issue of *Veterans' Health* focuses on a part of the body we may take for granted—the lungs. On the pages that follow, you will find information about how the lungs work. You will also learn

about conditions that can negatively affect your lungs, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma and allergies.

We explain common symptoms of these diseases and how you can avoid getting sick. If you have COPD, asthma or allergies, you will find tips on how to manage your symptoms and live your best life.

Telehealth at VA is another way you can get the care you need, right in the comfort of your home. Read the success story of Mr. McCandlish, a Veteran with COPD, who is healthier as a result of the Chillicothe VAMC's Home Telehealth Program.

Do you have a loved one who needs constant care? If so, turn to page 11 for some ideas, inspiration and resources that can help you cope with this most honorable and loving work.

Your VA health care team is proud to serve our Veterans and their loved ones. We are here to provide the care you need to help you feel your best!

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:

Veterans' Health
VA Healthcare System of Ohio Network Office
11500 Northlake Drive Suite 200
Cincinnati, OH 45249



New App!



One-stop resource for VA benefit information

Ask general VA benefits questions and receive answers 24/7 from any mobile device.

- Request information on health care benefits, pensions, life insurance, dependents, survivor benefits and more.
- Get answers to plain English questions by a live person.
- Answers always include a clickable link to the information.
- Find VA facilities in any city.
- Your previous questions and answers are stored in the My Questions tab.

Don't have a smartphone? You can still use text messaging to **311838 (311VET)** anywhere in the United States. Available for Apple® and Android devices.

Are you 65 or older?

You served—you and your family deserve to be protected

Get your pneumonia shots

You'll need two doses:

1. Pneumovax-23 (you may have already had this one).
 2. Prevnar-13 is new and protects you against 13 pneumonia strains.
- You can get your shots at the same time you get your flu shot.
 - Most common symptoms of pneumonia include: Fever, nagging cough, difficulty breathing and chest pain.

Talk to your provider about getting vaccinated.

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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Social workers in PACT: What can they do for you?



In 2010, VA redesigned its primary care clinics. Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACTs) were created to support Veterans working with health care staff to plan for their care and life-long health and wellness. In this issue, we will focus on the partnership with social workers. There is a social work case manager for each PACT site. The role of the social worker is to assess and treat psychosocial and environmental factors that may impact your health and wellness. This includes your mental health and your ability to cope with changes in your health, your family or support system, your economic situation or your housing. When you don't know where to seek help, you can call or visit your social worker for assistance. They can help you with access to these resources:

Access to care

Where can you find health care and how to pay for it?

- Prepare advance directives—durable power of attorney for health care and living will.
- Answer questions about the VA means test, co-payments and bills from the VA.
- Answer questions about Medicare, Medicaid and referrals for dental care.
- Transportation options.
- Handicapped parking placard applications.

Financial support

Do you have enough money for your needs?

- Financial counseling.
- Information about temporary financial assistance.
- Referrals to employment services.
- Referrals for vocational rehabilitation programs.
- Information about disability applications (VA and Social Security).

Housing

Do you need help to repair your home or to find other suitable housing?

- Weatherization/home improvement programs.

- Assistance to get a medical certificate to avoid a utility shut-off.
- Information on more affordable housing.
- Assistance with making your housing more handicapped accessible.
- Information about group homes, assisted living, nursing homes, the Ohio Veterans Homes and homeless shelters.

Psychological evaluations and treatment

Could you benefit from mental health or substance use treatment?

- Assess your situation and make referrals as needed.
- Referrals for substance use treatment programs.

Social support

Do you want to improve the quality of the relationships you have with others?

- Assess your social support network and provide treatment or referrals to treatment.
- Help caregivers of Veterans.

Functional support

Do you need help with bathing, dressing, eating, cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping or managing money?

- Assess a Veteran's ability to self-care.
- Provide referrals for homemaking services, home health aide services, adult day health care, Meals on Wheels, respite care, payees, fiduciaries or guardians. **VH**

Here for you

If you need help in any of these areas, contact your PACT to schedule a visit to see your social worker.

Breathe in ... breathe out

Your lungs and respiratory system

The primary function of your respiratory system is to supply the blood with oxygen that is carried to all parts of your body. The respiratory system, made up of the mouth, nose, trachea, lungs and diaphragm, does this through breathing, also called respiration.

The act of breathing

Breathing starts at the nose and mouth, through which you inhale air. The air then travels down the back of your throat and into your trachea (windpipe). As the trachea enters the chest cavity, it divides into two main bronchial tubes. The right and left bronchi lead into each lung.

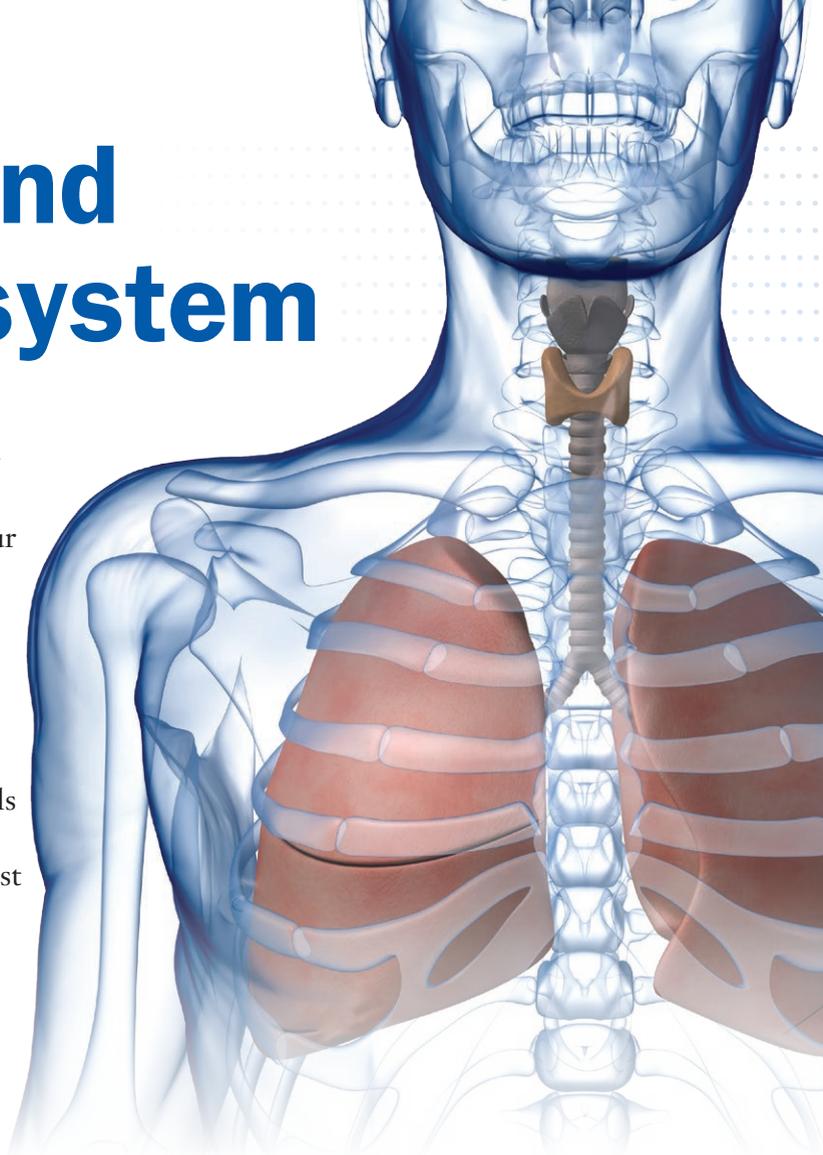
As the bronchial tubes pass through the lungs, they divide into smaller air passages called bronchioles. The bronchioles end in tiny balloon-like air sacs called alveoli. Your lungs have over 400 million alveoli.

Tiny blood vessels (capillaries) form a mesh around the alveoli. It is here that oxygen from your inhaled air passes through the alveoli and into the blood. Oxygen-rich blood leaves your lungs and goes to the heart to be pumped out to the rest of your body through your arteries.

As the cells in your body use the oxygen, carbon dioxide is produced and absorbed back into the blood in your veins. The veins carry the carbon dioxide back to your lungs, where it is removed from your body when you exhale (breathe out).

Your diaphragm helps this process. The diaphragm is a large, dome-shaped muscle under the lungs. When you inhale (breathe in), the diaphragm contracts downward; this creates a vacuum that causes a rush of fresh air into the lungs. The opposite occurs when you exhale. The diaphragm relaxes upward, pushing on the lungs, allowing them to deflate.

Your ribs support and protect the chest cavity



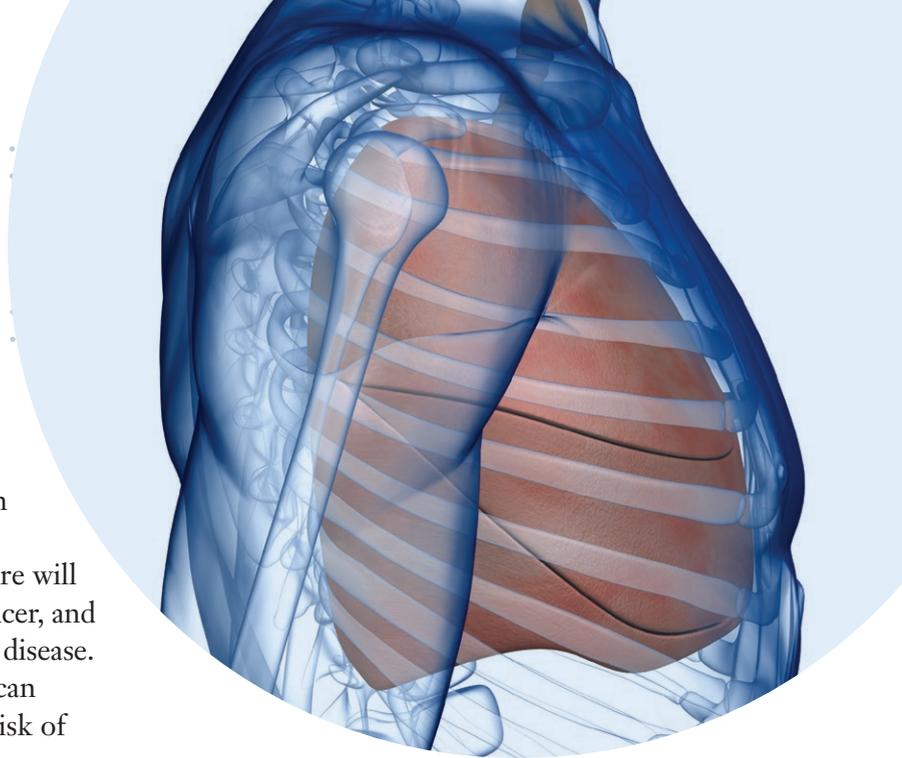
and lungs. They move to a limited degree, helping the lungs to expand and contract.

You have a natural defense system! The bronchial tubes are lined with cilia (like very tiny hairs) that have a wave-like motion. The motion carries mucus upward and out into the throat. The mucus catches and holds much of the dust, germs and other unwanted matter that enter the lungs. You get rid of this when you cough, sneeze, clear your throat or swallow.

Keep your lungs healthy

We often don't think about the important role our lungs play in our health. It's not until we have problems breathing that we take notice. But the truth is, like the rest of our body, our lungs need daily care and attention.

Breathing feeds oxygen to every cell in the body. Without enough oxygen, people are more prone to health problems such as lung and heart disease, as well as cancer.



Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is the fourth-leading cause of death in the U.S. (See page 6 to learn more about COPD.) This year, in the United States, there will be more than 200,000 new cases of lung cancer, and more than 150,000 people will die from the disease.

If we take good care of our lungs they can last a lifetime. Take action to reduce your risk of lung disease.

Don't smoke!

Hands down, smoking is the worst thing you can do to your lungs. The more you smoke the greater your risk for COPD and lung cancer. Smoke from cigarettes, pipes, cigars and marijuana harm the lungs and make breathing more difficult. Even e-cigarettes are harmful. Over time, smoke destroys lung tissue and may trigger changes that grow into cancer.

Avoid exposure to pollutants

Pollutants to avoid include:

- **Secondhand smoke.** Make sure your home and car are smoke-free.
- **Outdoor air pollution.** Avoid being outdoors on bad air days.
- **Chemicals in the home.** Use safe products in well-ventilated areas.
- **Chemicals in the workplace.** Wear protective masks and equipment.
- **Radon.** Test your home.

Prevent infection

Protect yourself from colds and flu:

- Wash your hands often; use hand sanitizers when you can't wash.
- Avoid crowds during cold and flu season.
- Practice good oral hygiene. Floss daily and brush your teeth twice a day.
- Get a yearly flu vaccine. Talk to your doctor to see if a pneumonia vaccine is right for you.

- If you get sick, protect the people around you. Stay home from work until you feel better.

Exercise

Exercise will help you get more out of your lungs. Your lungs need at least 20 minutes of moderately intense movement a day, like taking a brisk walk. And, you can help cleanse your lungs by frequently taking slow deep breaths during the day.

Get checked

Lung disease can go undetected until it is serious. During a checkup, your doctor will listen to your breathing. See your health care team if you have any of these symptoms:

- Shortness of breath during simple activities.
- Pain when breathing.
- Dizziness with a change in activity.
- A cough that won't go away.
- Wheezing with exertion.
- Cough with exercise.
- Pain in your airways. **VH**

Did you know?

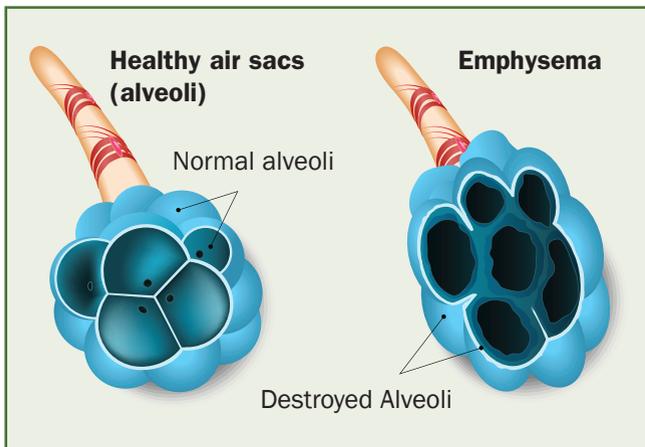
While e-cigarettes don't produce tobacco smoke, they still contain nicotine and other potentially harmful chemicals.

What is COPD?

COPD is short for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Chronic means it is a long-lasting lung disease that can be controlled, but not cured. When you have COPD, the airways in your lungs are blocked or obstructed. This causes shortness of breath. The shortness of breath typically worsens over time. Difficulty tolerating exercise is also common as COPD progresses. Emphysema and chronic bronchitis are two common types of COPD. Many people have both.

Emphysema

With emphysema, the airways are damaged and lose their elasticity. The air sacs overstretch and rupture or collapse. You do not get as much oxygen to your blood when the air sacs are broken. This makes it harder to breathe.



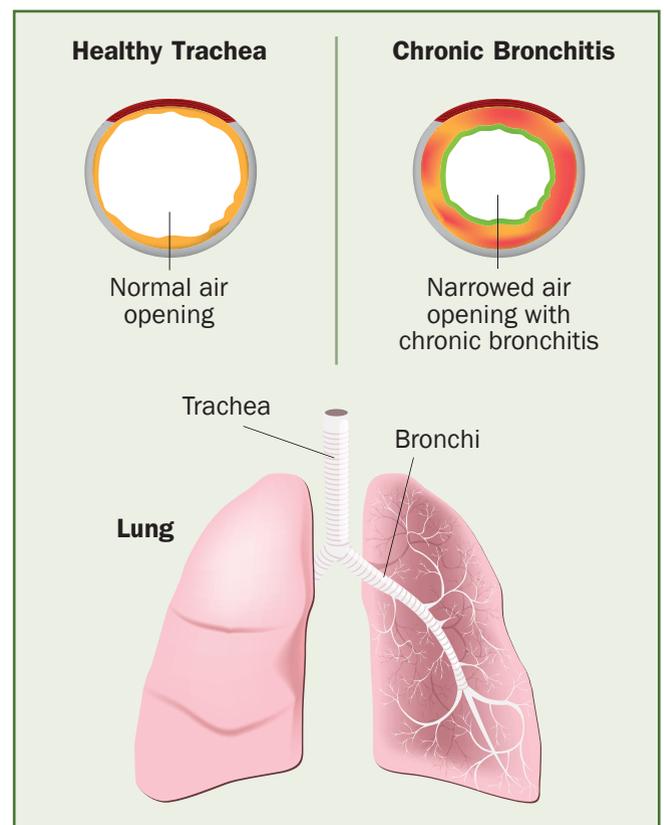
Chronic bronchitis

With chronic bronchitis, a chronic cough with excessive mucus production is present for at least three months of the year for more than two years consecutively. The lining of the airways may become swollen and narrow due to the mucus buildup. The airway walls are scarred and thickened. The airways do not expand and open fully when needed.

COPD is the fourth leading cause of death in the United States. More than 11 million people have been diagnosed with COPD. However,

it's thought that up to 24 million may have the disease with many not knowing they have it. The number of deaths from COPD is growing. Deaths due to COPD are higher in women than in men.

Many times, COPD is not found until the disease is very advanced. This is because people are not aware of or ignore the early warning signs. Often, people shrug off shortness of breath as a sign of aging. But, shortness of breath is never normal. Finding COPD early is important. Much can be done to treat and manage the disease.



Symptoms of COPD

- Chronic constant cough.
- Excess mucus.
- Shortness of breath (feeling like you can't take a deep breath).
- Shortness of breath when doing everyday activities.
- Clearing the throat frequently.
- Wheezing.

Causes and irritants

- Smoking is the major cause of chronic bronchitis and emphysema.
- Dust exposure.
- A rare protein deficiency called alpha-1-antitrypsin (AAT) can cause emphysema.
- Occupations that can cause chronic bronchitis:
 - Coal mining
 - Grain handling
 - Metal molding

Prevent COPD

Avoid these irritants for chronic bronchitis and emphysema:

- Smoke from cigarettes, cigars, pipes and fireplaces.
- Strong odors from fragrances, cleaning products and cooking.
- Air pollution.
- Dusts and fine powders.

Tips for living with COPD

Prevent infections:

- Get your vaccinations (pneumonia and yearly flu shots).
- Wash your hands often.
- Avoid being around sick people.

Eat small, healthy meals five to six times per day:

- Choose foods high in protein, dairy, fruits and vegetables, breads and starches.
- Drink at least six to eight glasses of water every day (unless you have been instructed otherwise).
- Avoid foods that cause gas (such as onions and cabbage).

Conserve your energy:

- Take breaks when doing tasks or activities.
- Rest after meals.
- Practice relaxation exercises when stressed.
- Sit down when possible (use a shower chair, sit when shaving and dressing).

Take positive steps:

- Talk to your health care provider about exercise.

Breathing exercises can help

Pursed-lip breathing

This breathing will help get trapped air out of the lungs and fresh oxygenated air in the bloodstream. Breathe in slowly through the nose (to the count of two) and breathe out slowly with pursed-lips to the count of four (it may help to pretend you are blowing out a candle or whistling).

Diaphragmatic breathing (belly breathing)

This breathing can help strengthen the breathing muscles and make breathing easier. To do this exercise, sit up in a chair or lie on your back. Get comfortable and relaxed.

Put one hand on your stomach and the other arm on your upper chest. Breathe in slowly through your nose keeping your chest still. The hand on your abdomen should move outward. Breathe out through pursed-lips slowly and without effort to the count of four (causing the stomach to fall). Your chest should remain still.



- If you smoke, get help to quit. Your lung health will improve.
- Avoid irritants.
- Take medications as prescribed.
- Talk to your health care provider if your medicine doesn't seem to be working. **VH**

Asthma: What you should know



Asthma is a lung disease that keeps people from getting air into their lungs. People who have asthma have very sensitive airways. When something triggers an “asthma attack,” the airways become swollen and filled with mucus. The opening for air becomes very small—it’s like trying to breathe through a pinched straw. Not getting enough air is very frightening. Fear can tighten the chest muscles and make it even harder to draw a deep breath.

Asthma affects people of all ages, but it most often starts during childhood. In the United States, about 20 million people have asthma. About 9 million of them are children. African Americans are more likely to have asthma than both Caucasians and Hispanics.

Symptoms

Sometimes asthma symptoms are mild and go away on their own or after treatment with asthma medicine. Other times, symptoms continue to get worse over time. If you have asthma, it’s important to treat symptoms when you first notice them. This may prevent the symptoms from getting worse. Severe asthma attacks may require emergency care, and they can be fatal.

Asthma symptoms include:

- Wheezing (a whistling sound as you breathe).
- Coughing, especially early in the morning or at night.
- Chest tightness (a feeling that something is squeezing your chest).
- Shortness of breath (feeling like you can’t catch your breath).

Not all people who have asthma have all these symptoms. Having these symptoms doesn’t always mean that you have asthma. Asthma is diagnosed with lung function tests, a medical history and a physical exam. You may also need allergy tests.

Causes

An asthma attack happens when people with asthma are exposed to “triggers.” Asthma triggers aren’t the same for everyone. Your doctor can help you find out what causes your asthma to flare up. Common triggers are:

- Allergens (such as dust, pollen, perfume, mold and pets).
- Tobacco smoke.
- Air pollution.
- Exercise.
- Airway infections.
- Some types of food.

If you have asthma, know what triggers your attacks and how to keep the attacks from getting worse.

Medicine

There are two kinds of asthma medicine:

- 1. Quick-relief medicines** to stop asthma symptoms when you are having an attack or to use before strenuous exercise.
- 2. Long-term control medicines** to take every day to prevent attacks from happening.

If you have to use your **quick-relief** asthma medicine more often than usual, tell your health care provider. It may be a sign that you need a change in medicine.

Asthma has no cure. But with today’s knowledge and treatments, asthma shouldn’t stop anyone from doing the activities they love. **VH**

Understanding allergies

An allergy is a reaction by your immune system to something in your environment.

Substances that often cause reactions include:

- Pollen
- Dust mites
- Mold spores
- Pet dander
- Food
- Insect stings
- Medicines

Your immune system is your body's defense against germs. In most allergic reactions, it is responding to a false alarm. Your genes and the environment can both play a role.

Allergies can cause symptoms such as runny nose, sneezing, itching, rashes, swelling or asthma. Allergies can range from minor to severe. Anaphylaxis is a severe reaction that can be life-threatening.

Seasonal allergies

Seasonal allergies result from grass, weeds, tree pollen or mold. If you have seasonal allergies:

- Stay indoors on dry, windy days.
- Don't mow the lawn or garden; wear a dust mask if you do.
- Remove clothes you've worn outside.
- Shower to rinse pollen from your skin and hair.
- Avoid outdoor activity in the early morning when pollen counts are the highest.
- Use air conditioning in your house and car.

Colds, allergies and sinusitis

Cold weather is a prime time for stuffy noses, sore throats and watery, itchy eyes. If symptoms last more than a week or if they seem to come and go based on your surroundings, you may have allergies or sinusitis.

Colds are caused by a virus. Allergies are caused by exposure to an allergen. Both colds and allergies can lead to sinusitis. Sinusitis occurs when the sinuses become swollen and block mucous from draining; this leads to pain, pressure and infection. People with allergies are more likely to have sinus problems, because their nasal and sinus tissue can become swollen when they breathe in triggers like dust, pollen or smoke. **VH**

How to reduce indoor exposure	
Dust mites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encase mattress, pillows and box springs in special allergy covers. • Wash bedding weekly and use dryer on high setting. • Reduce indoor humidity to below 50 percent. • Remove carpets from bedroom. • Replace old furniture with leather, vinyl or wood products. • Clean, mop or vacuum floors at least weekly. • Remove clutter. • Use washable, vinyl or roll-type window covers.
Pet dander	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove pets from the house or at least from bedrooms. • Use a HEPA filter. • Replace furnace filters regularly. • Use vacuums with HEPA filters.
Indoor mold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean moldy surfaces with a dilute bleach solution. • Fix water leaks. • Avoid using humidifiers. Keep indoor humidity below 50 percent.

	Symptoms	Duration
Colds	Same as allergies, but also includes sore throat and mild to moderate hacking cough	Clears up in 7 to 10 days.
Allergies	Runny or stuffy nose; sneezing; wheezing; watery or itchy eyes	Lasts as long as the exposure.
Sinusitis	Swollen, painful feeling around forehead, eyes and cheeks; stuffy nose with thick, colored mucous; post nasal drip; sore throat; cough; fever	Acute sinusitis lasts less than 4 weeks. Chronic sinusitis lasts 3 months or longer.

Telehealth success story

During a hospital stay for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in 2007, Mr. McCandlish was approached by his health care team about the Chillicothe Home Telehealth Program. His initial reaction was very positive. He knew there would be a benefit to being able to remotely measure and track his vital signs, as well as have a nurse check his vitals daily.

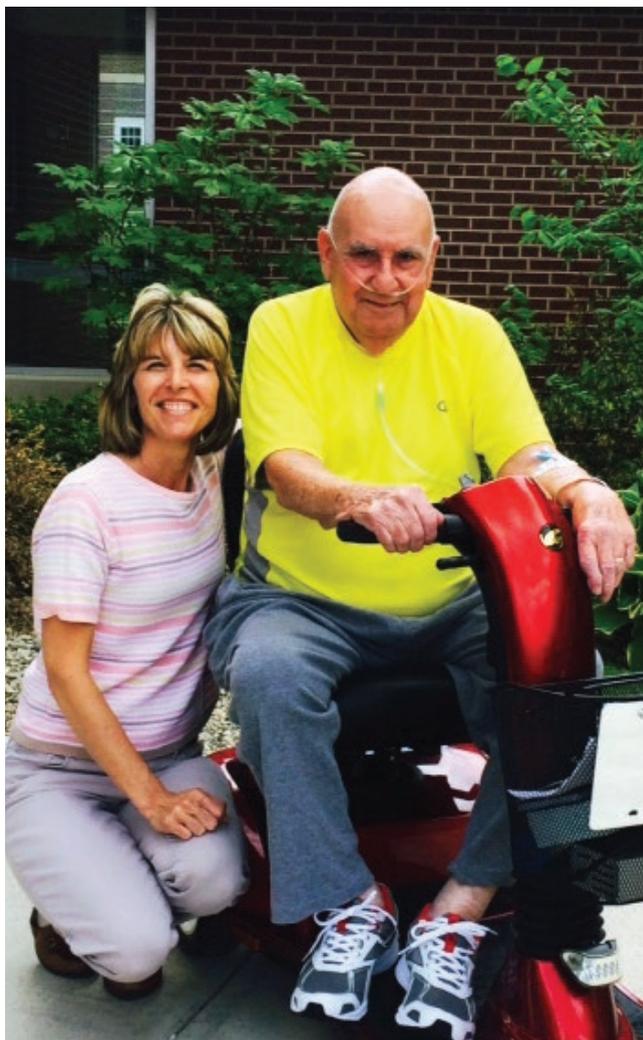
Once enrolled, he found even more benefits in the telehealth system. He received both medical advice and education. He was able to discuss his disease with his telehealth nurse and have his questions answered without the time and travel constraints of an office visit. He found that he had a much-improved understanding of his disease. And, he was able to use this knowledge to improve his quality of life.

Catching problems early

Mr. McCandlish became aware of the early warning signs and symptoms that were indicators of a COPD flare-up. By catching problems early, his telehealth team could quickly provide advice and adjust his plan of care. Over time, this prevented many trips to the ER and even hospital admissions.

He values the help he received from his nurses with medications and scheduling appointments. Mr. McCandlish states, “I felt like they are always on top of things. If I have questions about my medications or other health needs or concerns, I can call one of my telehealth nurses. It really has given me peace of mind.”

Now that his COPD is severe, Mr. McCandlish says it’s difficult for him to travel 60 miles for an office visit. So, the telehealth program has become even more valuable. Fewer clinic visits and hospital admissions are a real plus. “I’m very blessed in my life and have a wonderful wife who takes good care of me,” says Mr. McCandlish. “I’m glad for my daily telehealth sessions. They help keep me out of the hospital.” **VH**



Helping you achieve your health goals

The Chillicothe Home Telehealth Program identifies patients with chronic conditions. The goal is to work with them to improve their care and quality of life. Our staff feels it is a privilege to provide care for Veterans such as Mr. McCandlish. Stories like his provide our staff with all the motivation needed to ensure our Veterans receive the best care possible. Speak to your health care team to learn more about the Home Telehealth Program.

Coping skills for caregivers

About 43.5 million people in the United States provide in-home, long-term care for older adult family members with a chronic illness, such as Alzheimer's disease, dementia, chronic lung disease, multiple sclerosis or cancer. Most of these caregivers are women who spend 20 to 40 hours a week providing care.

While it has its rewards, it is also hard work. Caregivers often end up feeling stressed and burned-out. If you place your own physical and emotional needs after your care responsibilities, you risk finding yourself feeling frustrated, angry, depressed or physically ill. Don't let this happen to you.

Start by identifying any problems you are having. Make a list of all the issues or situations that are causing you stress. Go back through the list and identify the things that you have control over. Then start making a plan to regain control of your life.

Take care of yourself

Staying well (physically and mentally) will help you have more energy for giving care. Time is most likely your most precious resource. Don't forget to save some time for yourself each and every day.

If you wait until everything is done, it will never happen. Make sure you do some things just for you!

- **Exercise.** It will help reduce stress and depression. You will sleep better and have more energy. Walking is something almost anyone can do. Strive to walk at least 30 minutes a day, even if you have to break it up into 10-minute chunks of time.
- **Maintain your normal activities.** Going to the bank, getting a haircut or going shopping can help you feel more energized and reduce stress.
- **Eat healthy.** When you are busy, it can seem easier to eat fast foods. Healthy meals can be easy to

prepare, and a good diet will give you more energy.

- **Have some fun.** Do something you enjoy like reading or crafts.
- **Stay connected with others.** Spend time with friends and loved ones. Build a strong support system.

Take care of your emotions

- Watch for signs of depression, anxiety or burnout. Get help if you need it.
- Manage stress that comes with caregiving. Accept that you can't do or fix everything.
- Give yourself credit for taking on a hard job and doing it as well as you can.
- Blow off steam. Find someone who will listen and support you.
- Feed your spirit. Meditate or do another relaxation activity.

Accept outside help

Ask for help or time away from home caregiving through the help of community programs, support groups, family, friends and neighbors.

- Contact your local Council on Aging to see what is available.
- Check and see if there are any VA benefits.
- Contact your Veteran Service Organization to see what services or programs they offer in your area. **VH**

Caregiving Websites

Use these reliable websites for more information.

Alzheimer's Association—www.alz.org

Family Caregiver Alliance—www.caregiver.org

National Alliance for Caregiving—www.caregiving.org

National Family Caregivers Association—www.nfcares.org





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Athens, OH 45701
740-593-7314

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

Lancaster CBOC
1703 N. Memorial Drive
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

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

Georgetown CBOC
4903 State Route 125
Georgetown, OH 45121
937-378-3413

Hamilton CBOC
1750 South Erie Highway
Hamilton, OH 45011
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Middletown, OH 45005
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Richmond, IN CBOC
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Central Ohio

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Columbus, OH 43219
614-257-5200

Grove City CBOC
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Grove City, OH 43123
614-257-5800

Marion CBOC
1203 Delaware Ave.
Corporate Center #2
Marion, OH 43302
740-223-8809

Newark CBOC
1855 West Main St.
Newark, OH 43055
740-788-8329

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