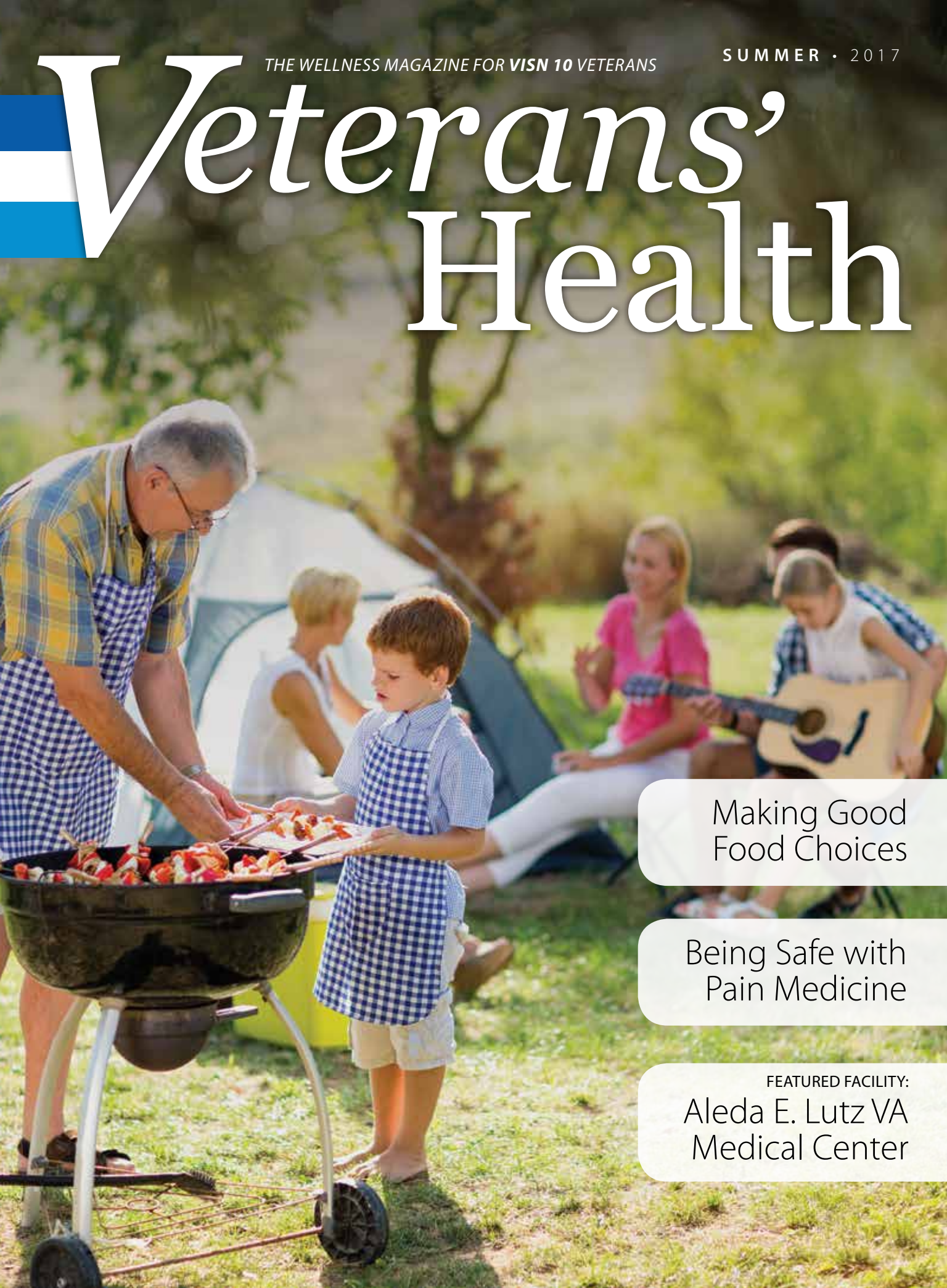
THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE FOR **VISN 10** VETERANS

SUMMER • 2017

Veterans' Health



Making Good Food Choices

Being Safe with Pain Medicine

FEATURED FACILITY:
Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

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2. ***In your mailbox:*** Get a printed copy mailed to your home. Fill out and mail the form on the back cover of this magazine. Or, send an email request to V10magazine@va.gov. Please include the full name and mailing address of the Veteran.

Go to www.visn10.va.gov to read past issues of *Veterans' Health*. Click on the NEWS & EVENTS link.

Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System VISN 10, one of the 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 VISN 10 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.

To our readers

Robert McDivitt, Network Director

The warm weather is here, but summer is about much more than the sunshine and outdoors. We look forward to this time of year because we celebrate our nation's Independence Day. It is a great opportunity to honor our Veterans who have sacrificed so much for our freedom.

In this month's issue, we have a wide variety of information to help you get — or stay — healthy. Turn to page 4 to learn about safe and healthy cooking at your summer gatherings. Find out how the VA helps Veterans learn to cook delicious and healthy dishes.

Opioid overdose and addiction is a major problem in the U.S. Even legally prescribed medications pose a problem. Important information about this epidemic is included on pages 6 and 7.

Looking for an inspirational story to brighten your day? Page 8 has one amazing account of a Veteran who went from a patient to a peer support specialist, where he supports and encourages other Veterans in the VA health care system.

Are you using My Health*e*Vet? Learn how this tool can make your life easier and help you get the most out of your VA health care!

Robert P. McDivitt, FACHE
Network Director, VISN 10

VISN 10: We're Here for You

This map shows the location of some of the many VA health care facilities in our Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN). We have 10 medical center, one ambulatory care center, and 63 community based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) to serve more than 680,000 Veterans in three states.

To find the nearest VA medical center or schedule an appointment, visit *www.visn10.va.gov*.

Facility Highlight:

Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center

The Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center serves Veterans in 35 counties across central and northern Michigan's Lower Peninsula. Located in Saginaw, Michigan, it is the parent facility for outpatient clinics located in:

- Alpena
- Bad Axe
- Cadillac
- Cheboygan County
- Clare
- Gaylord
- Grayling
- Oscoda
- Traverse City

The Aleda E. Lutz VAMC has an 8-bed medical ward that can provide heart monitoring. An 81-bed community living center is available for skilled care, rehabilitation and palliative care.

Aleda E. Lutz VAMC offers primary care and specialty care services, as well as outpatient surgery, outpatient mental health, and social work services for over 35,000 enrolled Veterans. The VAMC also provides education for students in medicine, nursing, pharmacy, dietetics, social work, and many other health professions. The facility has developed innovative programs for telehealth, Veteran transportation, and home-based primary care (HBPC) to serve Veterans in rural areas.

Spotlight on key services and initiatives:

Expansion of Home Based Primary Care (HBPC): HBPC provides medical, nursing, rehabilitation therapy, social work and nutritional services in the home to eligible Veterans. HBPC has recently expanded to the clinic in Oscoda, Michigan.

Relationship-Based Care: This program promotes a caring and healing environment by focusing on each patient and family. It also encourages VA employees to take care of each other and themselves, so they can provide a healthy environment for Veterans. Ultimately, the goal of Relationship-Based Care is to put the Veteran at the center of all we do.

Access to Services: We now provide same-day services for primary care and mental health. Veterans can schedule audiology and optometry appointments directly without going through primary care clinics. Saginaw VA will soon offer direct scheduling for podiatry and nutrition appointments.

Moving Forward: Aleda E. Lutz VAMC is working toward:

- Enhancing community partnerships in a variety of program support areas.
- Improving continuity of care between VA and non-VA services.
- Increasing access to care closer to the Veterans' homes.
- Expanding health care services wherever we can.
- Becoming a High Reliability Health Care Organization.

Contact Information

1500 Weiss Street
Saginaw, MI

Phone: 1-989-497-2500

www.saginaw.va.gov
www.facebook.com/vasaginaw

Don't "Spoil" Your Picnic

Practice Food Safety

Picnics and grilling offer fun opportunities to enjoy warmer weather with family and friends. Although this can be a delicious way to eat, grilling comes with some food poisoning risks. Guests who are young, elderly, or taking medications that compromise their immune system are especially vulnerable. Stay safe at your next outdoor picnic!

Don't spread germs

Wash your hands! Be aware of your actions while cooking. Scratching your scalp, wiping your nose, popping food samples into your mouth, touching countertops and doorknobs — all these actions can put dirt and bacteria onto your hands. Those germs can be transferred to food you are preparing for others to eat.

Disposable gloves can be used when chopping and mixing food. Gloves protect the food and keep it clean, but they can transfer germs too. Use them just one time and replace them often. Do not use gloves that have touched raw meat to prepare any foods you do not plan to cook, such as salads.

If you are taking raw meat or poultry to a picnic:

- Wrap it tightly so the juices don't leak onto other food.
- Keep it cold.
- Keep it separate from other prepared or raw foods.

Temperature matters

When food sits out in warm weather, it can quickly spoil. Hot foods should be kept hot (140 degrees or warmer) and cold foods should be kept cold (40 degrees or cooler). Put food away when it is not being eaten. Hot and cold foods should never sit out more than two hours (or one hour if the temperature is over 90 degrees). If foods have been out longer than that, throw them away.

Watch the bugs

Insects can carry germs from dish to dish. Cover food when service is done. Lids help preserve the temperature and block critters.

Eating Healthier, One Class at a Time

Veterans learn from Registered Dietitian, Christine Auinnan, about making healthy food choices during a Healthy Living Teaching Kitchen class at Ann Arbor VA.

Want to improve your cooking skills and learn about healthy food choices? Come visit a Healthy Teaching Kitchen and learn from a VA dietitian!

All VISN 10 facilities now have "Healthy Teaching Kitchens." Some offer cooking demonstrations while others provide cooking classes. Each VA facility selects different topics, but some of the lessons may include:

- Smart snack options
- New ways to make an old favorite
- Basic knife skills
- Spices that add flavor without salt
- Creating healthy recipes
- Cooking for diabetes

All the healthy teaching kitchens (HTKs) provide a chance to sample new flavors at tasting stations.

Classes welcome all skill levels. Veterans work together under the supervision of a cooking instructor. Some VA facilities even have a garden to add locally grown foods to their menus. Taking a VA class is just the first step. Veterans are encouraged to practice what they have learned at home. By doing so, they can better manage their diet and health.

A wide range of recipes are offered, including a pita pizza, summer corn bisque, grilled chicken with roasted red pepper sauce, and strawberry kiwi smoothies!

Veterans and their families can sample foods they may not have tried on their own. Many of the recipes used in HTKs are published in two cookbooks. Find them at www.nutrition.va.gov/Healthy_Teaching_Kitchen.asp.

To learn about your facility's HTKs, talk to your local VA dietitian or health care team.

Can't make the drive?

The Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Chicago live-streams HTK classes through their official Facebook page on the second Thursday of every month at 11 a.m. (Eastern Standard Time). Veterans can follow along in their own kitchen, or write down tips to try later. To catch a class, go to: www.facebook.com/VAChicago.

Videos of past HTK classes are available on YouTube. Visit www.youtube.com and search "Veterans Healthy Teaching Kitchens."

Going Overboard:

Be Safe with Pain Killers

Ninety-one Americans die every day from an overdose of pain medication such as opioids. That's more than 33,000 deaths a year. Over 650,000 opioid prescriptions are filled by drug stores every day.

Opioids are medicines that act on the nervous system. They are often the best drugs to treat acute (short-term) pain. This may be pain caused by serious injury or surgery. However, studies show that opioids are not very effective at relieving pain over a long period of time. Since opioids don't work as well as time goes on, people who depend on them for pain relief must take larger and larger doses. Most chronic (long-term) pain can be managed as well or better with non-opioid treatments. Doctors now recommend that people with chronic pain should decrease or stop using opioid drugs.

Many people start taking pain-killing drugs legally for an acute problem, but some continue to seek out these drugs even after their prescription runs out. This can be very dangerous. For example, if a person goes a few days without opioids their body may not be able to handle the same amount of medicine when starting again. In that case, they are at risk for an overdose.

A 2014 study showed that half of the people who misused prescription pain medicines got them from a family member or friend. Always keep your medications in a safe place, and do not share them with others.

Addiction to prescription pain killers can lead to an increased use of stronger illegal drugs like heroin. Heroin-related deaths more than tripled between 2010 and 2015. This is because more people are addicted to drugs and because people are mixing other opioids with heroin to get a stronger high.

Two of the added opioid drugs are fentanyl and carfentanil. Mixing fentanyl or carfentanil with heroin has caused many overdose deaths in the Midwest over the last year.

In an opioid overdose, a person's breathing slows and may even stop. Other signs of an overdose are:

- Pale, cool, sweaty skin
- Limp body, not moving
- Blue or gray lips and fingernails
- Pupils of the eye are tiny
- Cannot wake the person

The term "opioids" is used to describe prescription pain medications as well as illegal drugs. Some common opioids are:

- Codeine
- Oxycodone
- Oxymorphone
- Tramadol
- Buprenorphine
- Methadone
- Morphine
- Hydrocodone
- Meperidine
- Fentanyl
- Heroin
- Carfentanil

The VA recommends that everyone taking opioid pain killers (prescription or street drugs) have naloxone (Narcan) to use in case of an overdose. Naloxone is a drug that blocks the opioid action in the brain to reverse the overdose. It comes in a nasal spray or an injection. More than one dose of naloxone may be needed to stop an overdose because:

- The person may have taken very strong drugs.
- Naloxone wears off in 30-90 minutes, and drugs may still be in the person's system.

Who is at risk for overdose? People who:

- Have not used drugs for a few days (after leaving the hospital, jail or detox center)
- Use more than one drug (opioids, alcohol, cocaine, benzos)
- Have medical problems (liver, heart, lung, or advanced AIDS)
- Use long-acting opioids (like methadone)
- Use powerful opioids (like fentanyl and carfentanil)
- Use or take drugs without other people around

Responding to an overdose

1. Check for a response.
2. Give naloxone. Call 911.
3. Open airway, tilt chin. Give rescue breaths – 1 breath every 5 seconds. Give chest compressions if no pulse.
4. Give another naloxone dose after 2-3 minutes if they do not respond to the first.
5. Place person on their side if they are breathing. This can keep them from choking.
6. Get them to emergency care.

Help is available

- Local Emergency Services: 911
- National Poison Hotline: 1-800-222-1222
- Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 or text 838255
- VA Substance Abuse Disorder Program Locator: www.va.gov/directory/guide/SUD.asp

Get Involved in Your Health Care:
One Veteran's Story

By Mark Arrowsmith
Peer Support Specialist at the Chalmers P. Wylie Ambulatory Care Center in Columbus, Ohio

My VA odyssey started out as a patient, much like you. I was suffering from PTSD and a terminal illness and the VA was my last hope.

The positive attitude of the VA staff and their willingness to help was not what I expected, but I got caught up in it and felt at home almost at once.

As I began to recover, I took a course on living with chronic illness. It was so informative that I took it several times and was offered a chance to become a co-facilitator in the program. I jumped at the chance because I had learned that by helping other Vets, I was helping myself.

During an examination, some blood work showed I had a Hemoglobin A1C of 11.3. I learned about the Stanford Diabetes Self-Management Program* for people with diabetes, and I enrolled in it. Just by following their directions, my A1C is now 6.3. I owe it all to that team. One of the most important lessons I learned was moderation. You don't have to make drastic changes to improve your health.

From patient to peer support specialist, Mark Arrowsmith is grateful for the good care he has received from VA, and now loves helping others do the same.

I have gone from patient to volunteer to peer support specialist. I now spend my days working with Veterans who have had similar experiences. I can carry a message of hope because I know recovery is possible. I live it daily.

I look forward to each day knowing that I can make a difference in a Veteran's life. That's important to me because I remember how Vets were treated at the end of Vietnam. I'm now supported by a great team of people and work in an atmosphere that fosters genuine caring for those who have served our country.

During President Lincoln's second inaugural address, he spoke about what it would take to heal the nation, starting with the soldier that helped to preserve it. In what would become part of the VA motto, Lincoln said, "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan." I think, 150 years later, we've heard and answered that call.

**The six-week Stanford Diabetes Self-Management Program is available at most VA facilities in VISN 10. All facilities offer diabetes education classes. Ask your health care team for a referral.*

5 Tips for Safe Exercise

Making time for exercise is a great way to get fit and enjoy all the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. But, starting an exercise program that's too difficult or that doesn't fit your life or interests may prevent you from succeeding. Consider these tips before you start.

1. Start slowly

Moving too quickly into a rigorous routine can cause an injury, such as a sprain or broken bone. Then, you may have to quit exercise altogether.

The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend 30 minutes of exercise, 5 days a week. You can break those 30 minutes up into 10-minute pieces. And, any amount of exercise is better than none at all.

2. Get the right equipment

Exercise doesn't have to be expensive. You might just need to buy a supportive pair of walking shoes. If your shoes look worn or they cause soreness, it's time to replace them. Dress in loose-fitting clothing that allows you to move freely. During cooler days, dress in layers you can remove as you go.

3. Watch the weather

Exercising in extreme heat puts you at risk of fainting, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke, which can be life-threatening. Symptoms of heat-related illness can include:

- Muscle cramping
- Lightheadedness and/or fainting
- Nausea or vomiting
- Headache, irritability or confusion
- Cold, clammy skin
- Feeling very tired
- Problems with vision

On the hottest days, try indoor exercise in an air-conditioned area. Strength training, exercise videos, walking up and down stairs, or dancing to music are good options.

4. Don't skip warm-up and cool-down

A proper warm-up sends oxygen to your muscles and allows them to be more flexible. Spend five to 10 minutes doing a lower-intensity version of your routine. After exercising, your heart rate is faster and your blood vessels are dilated. Cooling down allows the body to slowly return to normal.

5. Be aware of your surroundings

- Don't talk on your phone while walking outside, and keep your headphone volume low. Otherwise, you may not hear another person or vehicle approaching.
- Stay in well-lit areas that have other people around. Take a flashlight and wear reflective gear at dawn, dusk, or after dark.

What's Happening with My HealtheVet?

Stay in touch with Secure Messaging, Blue Button

More Veterans Using Secure Messaging

My Healthe*e*Vet's Secure Messaging is a valuable tool that allows you to "talk" to your health care team by email. You don't have to call or make an appointment to get answers to routine questions. You can ask about VA appointments, medications, and VA lab results. You can also let your team know when something changes in your health or your health care outside the VA. Secure Messaging (SM) email is active in all VA primary care and mental health clinics. It is available for specialty clinics at many facilities.

About 2 million Veterans across the United States use this online technology. During a recent phone call to a MyHealthe*e*Vet (MHV) Coordinator, a ninety-year-old Veteran said:

"I think MHV and secure messaging is the greatest thing since pancakes! Often when calling the VA on the phone, you have to leave a message and sometimes get a call back within 48 hours. Secure messaging is so nice because I can get an answer as early as an hour after I send my message. This takes the stress out of it and solves the problem."

"I like to use the Blue Button feature to review my progress notes. I can use the information my providers and counselors write about me for my own personal self-improvement," says VANIHCS Veteran Calieb Goodman (pictured here).

Of course, not every email will be answered within an hour. But, the VA checks how quickly the staff respond to SM emails. Each message is tracked to be sure you get the answer to your question. VISN 10 is meeting its goal to ensure that 96 percent of emails are answered within three business days.

Veterans can send and receive SM emails from any computer, smartphone or tablet with internet access.

Go to the MyHealthe*e*Vet homepage (www.myhealth.va.gov) and click on "Messages." Click on the orange "Open Secure Messaging" button to start using secure messaging. Send your team a message today!

Blue Button
Download
My Data

Blue Button and your health records

Read your VA health record or lab results online anytime using MyHealth*e*Vet's Blue Button.

When you use the Blue Button, your VA health record is available for you to view and print. You can also download your information to your computer or other device. This allows you to take your information with you. You can share it whenever you need to, without the hassle of visiting a VA medical center for paper records.

"My experience has actually been very good. I have used MHV for the last five years to reorder medications and download reports from my medical record so that I could take them to an outside provider. I use it to send messages to my PACT team for concerns and requests," said a VA Northern Indiana Health Care System Veteran.

If you are a Veteran who gets health care at a VA facility and you have a premium MyHealth*e*Vet account, you can see your VA personal health record. For some Veterans, information from the Department of Defense (DoD) is available. You will see this in Blue Button as "DoD Military Service Information."

VANIHCS MHV Coordinator Dacia Overbey assists Veteran Rob Highland with accessing the Blue Button for his personal health information.

How to Register for a Premium MHV Account:

1. Go to the MyHealth*e*Vet website at www.myhealth.va.gov, and click on the "Register" button.
2. List your name as it is shown on your Veterans Information Card (VIC)/VA Medical Records.
3. On "Relationship to VA" check both Veteran and VA Patient.
4. Create a user ID. It must be unique, must contain no spaces and be 6 to 12 characters in length.
5. Create a password. Pick a password that you will remember easily. It must be: 8 to 12 characters in length; contain no spaces; and have at least one letter, one number, and one special character (e.g., !, *, #, %).
6. Password Hints and Questions: Cannot be the same two questions. The answers are case sensitive.
7. Read and click "Accept" for Terms of Agreement, Privacy Policy, and Secure Messaging.
8. Visit any VA facility to authenticate your account to premium status.

My healthevet
www.myhealth.va.gov
My Health, My Care: 24/7 Online Access to VA

VA Healthcare System Network Office
11500 Northlake Drive, Suite 200
Cincinnati, OH 45249

VA RESOURCES FOR YOU:

Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255

Telephone Care (after hours):
1-888-838-6446

Health Care Benefits Information:
1-877-222-8387

VA Benefits Information:
1-800-827-1000

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   11500 Northlake Drive, Suite 200
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(Note: copies of the magazine will only be mailed to households of Veterans who receive VA health care.)

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Find the Health Information You Need at VHL!

There are thousands of health information websites, but only one designed for Veterans and their family & friends.

The Veterans Health Library (www.veteranshealthlibrary.org) makes it easy to find answers to health questions and information on specific health topics.

- Read about topics important to your health to guide your decisions.
- View videos and animations to better understand your conditions.
- Test your knowledge with quizzes.
- Use calculators and other tools to determine your health needs.

Start using the Veterans Health Library today!

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