

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE FOR **VISN 10** VETERANS

WINTER • 2017

Veterans' Health



Good Nutrition
for a Good Life

Managing Blood
Sugar Better

Reducing
Chronic Pain



To our readers

As we move further into 2017, we're excited to see what this year may bring and how we can find new ways to better serve the Veterans in our area.

We are very excited about continuing to build the new VISN 10 to make it a great resource for all our Veterans. Read the article on this page to learn more about how these changes mean better care for you and all our Veterans.



Robert McDivitt, Network Director

In this issue of *Veterans' Health*, find tips on staying fit during the winter. Check out pages 4 and 5 for suggestions on eating healthy (there find a recipe for a delicious veggie bake). Read on page 7 about ways to increase your activity and move more this year.

Life can be a struggle when you suffer from a chronic condition. Learn on page 3 about how the VA is addressing hypoglycemia and addressing diabetes management. If you struggle with chronic pain or other chronic conditions, read on page 9 about how you can find solutions through the Stanford Self-Management Programs.

As always, your VA health care team puts Veterans at the center of all that we do. We are your partners for good health!

Robert P. McDivitt, FACHE
Network Director, VISN 10

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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.



Welcome to the NEW VISN 10

We are pleased to welcome you to the newly integrated VISN 10! It is comprised of 10 medical centers, the independent Columbus, OH Ambulatory Care clinic, and a network of 58 Community-Based Outpatient Clinics. With this change, you can continue to expect the best in personalized, proactive, patient-centered care, but now delivered within an even broader network. In doing so, we hope to excel even more at connecting you to the right care, at the right time, and at the right place. To find your nearest VA medical facility, visit www.visn10.va.gov.

Balancing Blood Sugar



Hypoglycemia Causes Concern Among VA Doctors



One in four Veterans suffer from diabetes. Many try to manage the disease through diet, exercise, stress reduction and medication. But what is a safe blood sugar level?

The VA and the Department of Defense recognize that the ideal blood sugar (glucose) level may differ from person to person. Finding a “safe” level depends on medication side effects, age, preferences, and other medical conditions. Medications, like insulin and some types of oral medications (sulfonylureas), lower blood sugar. But, these can also lead to levels that are too low. This can cause hypoglycemia – a serious medical condition. Those experiencing it may need immediate help or even hospitalization.

Who is at risk for hypoglycemia?

Those at higher risk for hypoglycemia include patients over age 75 and those who have had diabetes for many years. They may also be those on insulin, those who often skip meals or don't eat regularly, or those who have other significant medical conditions. Even healthy individuals can have a serious reaction. Sometimes people can tell their blood sugar is dropping, but not always. Symptoms may include:

- Weakness
- Shakiness
- Hunger
- Sweating
- Lightheadedness
- A feeling of “not being right”

If using a home test, a number less than “70” often means you are experiencing hypoglycemia.

Tailored solutions

The Department of Health and Human Services and the “Hypoglycemia Safety Initiative” (HSI) encourage health care providers to individualize diabetes management for their patients. A high-risk patient may need to aim for an A1c blood sugar target (average blood sugar target over 3 months) of 7-8% or even 8-9% rather than “tight control” (<7%). But, low blood sugar can occur at any time. How patients manage their diabetes is their personal choice.

“Doctors need to fully inform their patients of their options, using a process known as Shared Decision Making. They should allow patients and their families to decide what's best for them,” says Dr. Brian Burke, Chief of Diabetes Services at the Dayton VAMC.

A doctor may also recommend that a patient switch their medication, even if it seems to work. Some glucose-lowering medications, such as sulfonylureas and all insulins, can cause hypoglycemia. Changing the dosage or switching to another medication could help reduce that risk.

Managing diabetes can seem like a balancing act. Be patient. Work with your doctor to find the range and regimen that's right for you.

Eat Up!

Good Nutrition for a Good Life



Eating a healthy diet is one of the best things you can do for your health. You may have heard that message many times, but do you heed it? If you're like many Americans, you may fall far short of what you should eat each day. And this nutritional neglect might cost you.

ChooseMyPlate.gov recommends two cups of fruits and vegetables (each), 6-8 ounces of whole grains, and 5-6 ounces of protein a day. But, most adults fall far short of this. Most of their daily calories are spent eating simple carbohydrates, such as sugar and refined grains, and unhealthy fats.



About half of all American adults have one or more chronic diseases they could manage better with a healthier diet. Diseases like cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and poor bone health are often connected with poor eating habits and physical inactivity.

Add to that the nationwide weight problem, and it is clear things need to change. More than two-thirds of adults and nearly one-third of children and youth are overweight or obese, and it's been that way for more than two decades. The National Institutes of Health report that obesity and overweight, together, are the second leading cause of preventable death in the United States.

Make Every Calorie Count

When making healthy eating choices, remember that food is fuel. All food and beverage choices matter. Your body runs on complex carbohydrates, protein and fat – and it needs a variety of these types of foods each day. Choosing “nutrient-dense” foods will help you make the best use of what you're eating – giving you energy, helping you manage weight, and protecting you against disease.



Herbed Vegetable Combo



Warm up with this recipe and get started on adding healthier foods into your diet.

Ingredients:

- 2 Tbsp. water
- 1 cup zucchini squash, thinly sliced
- 1-1/4 cups yellow squash, thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup green pepper, cut into 2 inch strips
- 1/4 cup celery, cut into 2 inch strips
- 1/4 cup onion, chopped
- 1/2 tsp. caraway seed
- 1/8 tsp. garlic powder
- 1 medium tomato, cut into 8 wedges

Directions:

1. Heat water in large fry pan. Add squash, green pepper, celery, and onion.
2. Cover and cook over moderate heat until vegetables are tender-crisp, about 4 minutes. Sprinkle seasonings over vegetables.
3. Top with tomato wedges. Cover and cook over low heat until tomato wedges are just heated, about 2 minutes.

Serves 4. Serving size: about 3/4 cup each. Per Serving: 25 Calories, Trace of Total fat, 11mg Sodium

Smart Recipe Swaps



You can reduce fat and calories without sacrificing taste by swapping out a few ingredients in your favorite recipes, according to the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension experts.

- Use two egg whites in place of one egg to reduce cholesterol.
- Use low-sodium, fat-free chicken broth in your mashed potatoes to add flavor and cut back on added butter or margarine.
- Substitute applesauce for oil, margarine, or butter in muffins and breads, such as banana bread. Try substituting a small amount at first. The more you substitute, the more the texture of the finished product changes.
- For dips, sauces and pie toppings, use fat-free yogurt, sour cream and whipped topping.
- Sliced almonds make a delicious crunchy topping in place of buttery croutons.
- Choose reduced-fat or low-fat cheeses for salads and casseroles.



Foods to Help You Focus



You know the right foods are good for your body, but did you know they can help your brain too? Many foods can actually improve brain function, according to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics:

- **Vegetables.** Cruciferous vegetables like broccoli, cabbage or cauliflower boos brain power. Dark leafy greens, such as spinach, kale, mustard greens and dark lettuce, also improve concentration and memory.
- **Dark-colored berry** Blackberries, blueberries and cherries have nutrients that your brain needs for optimal function. If you choose dried fruits, read the label and avoid any with added sugar.
- **Omega-3 fatty acids.** Fatty fish, such as salmon, bluefin tuna, sardines and herring, contain high amounts of omega-3 fatty acids. Vegetarian sources include flaxseed, chia seeds and walnuts.



These foods are also great for your heart and overall health. Try working them into your daily diet for maximum brain benefit and a healthier you.

Keep Zika at Bay When Traveling

Cabin fever and freezing temperatures make many northerners long wistfully for warm breezes and walks on the beach. If you're planning an adventure to a warm climate, take steps now to reduce risks for contracting the Zika virus.

Zika is a viral infection spread mostly by mosquitoes, but sexual transmission is also possible. It causes mild illness in most people, but for some people the risks can be

more severe. If Zika is passed from a pregnant woman to her unborn child, it can cause certain birth defects. This includes microcephaly, in which a baby is born with a significantly smaller head size.

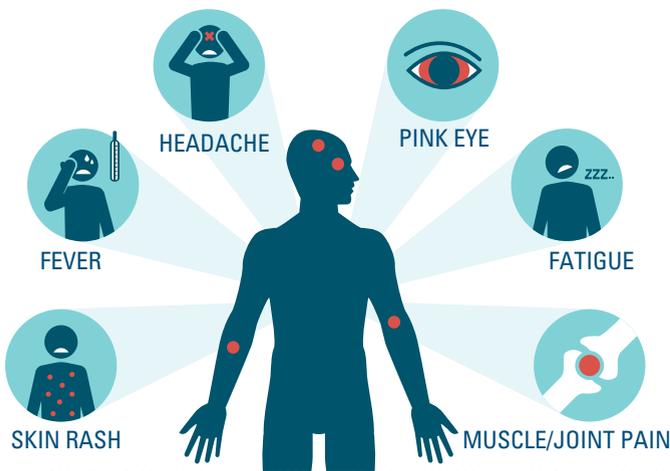
Although it happens less frequently, others may be at risk for Guillain-Barre syndrome. This is a rare disorder that can cause muscle weakness and paralysis for a few weeks to several months.



There is no vaccine or specific treatment for Zika, yet. The best way to prevent Zika is to protect yourself and your family.

SYMPTOMS

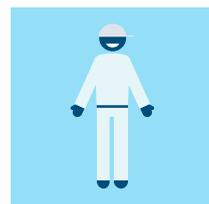
Most people have only mild symptoms that last a few days. They may not know they even have it.



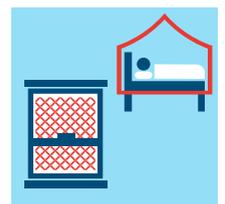
PREVENTION



Use insect repellent containing DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, IR3535, or 2-undecanone (methyl nonyl ketone).



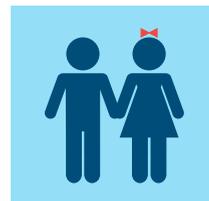
Wear light-colored clothes that cover as much of your body as possible.



Stay in places with air conditioning or window screens to keep mosquitos out. Consider using a mosquito bed net.



Stay away from standing water.



Use condoms or practice abstinence while traveling in high-risk Zika areas.



Veteran patients that may have been exposed to Zika can receive testing at any VA facility.

TREAT THE SYMPTOMS

At this time, there is no vaccine or medicine for Zika.



REST



DRINK WATER



TAKE MEDICATIONS FOR PAIN & FEVER



CALL YOUR DOCTOR

Get CDC Text Updates

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) can help you with preparing for your trip, no matter where you go. Text PLAN to (855) 255-5606 and sign up for Zika text updates from CDC. You'll also get tips on how to:

- Pack and plan for your trip
- Stay protected on your trip
- Stay healthy when you return home

Get Back into the Exercise Habit

7 Tips For Moving More in 2017



Stressful and busy times in our lives often get in the way of exercise. Whether you've been busy with your job, family, or other commitments, it is possible to get back into a fitness habit. If you haven't exercised for months or even years, here are some safe ways to start fresh and enjoy all the healthy benefits of exercise again.

1. **Go easy at first.**

Understand that your body will need to work back up to its prior fitness level. Go for a shorter and lighter workout and see how you feel the next day. Gradually make it longer and more difficult each time. This will help you avoid injury and soreness.



2. **Don't be frustrated.**

Perhaps you can't run as fast or lift as many pounds as you did before. That's to be expected. You can, however, keep working at your fitness goals to be your healthiest self. Each day you exercise, you get closer to reaching that goal.

3. **Recovery is important.**

You may notice more soreness at first, as your body adjusts to exercise again. Be sure you cool down and stretch at the end of your workout.

4. **Set realistic goals.**

Fitness goals can help move you forward. But goals that are too difficult to reach may cause you to throw in the towel. Be proud of any progress you make and each day you are active.



5. **Ask a friend to join you.** Having a workout buddy can help you stay motivated and make it fun. Perhaps your friend can join you at the gym or for walks around the neighborhood a few times a week.

6. **Consider a coach or trainer.**

Professional fitness experts can help you avoid injury and get you on a good fitness plan. Some gyms offer free or low-cost training sessions to new members.



7. **Pick the right time of day.**

Choose a time when you feel more energetic. Even a short walk during your lunch hour has health benefits. Remind yourself that once you get started, you may find that your energy levels increase and it gets easier.

Reducing Chronic Pain

Chronic pain is a fact of life for many people. The stress and trauma experienced during active duty puts Veterans especially at high-risk for it. In fact, 44 percent of U.S. military members have reported chronic pain after deployment.

Chronic pain is defined as pain that lasts longer than 90 days, but for many people chronic pain can last years. How chronic pain is managed is not the same for everyone. There are quite a few options open to you.

Talk to your VA provider about managing your chronic pain. Do not make any changes to your pain treatment plan without first consulting your doctor.

Opioids

Opioids (also “opiates” or “narcotics”) are medications that are often used to treat pain. These pain medications can be dangerous if they are not taken responsibly and under close supervision. Opioids may reduce your pain considerably, but they don’t always take it away entirely. These drugs may not work for you, or your provider may decide they are unsafe for you. For more information on using opioids safely and effectively, visit www.va.gov/PAINMANAGEMENT/Opioid_Safety_Initiative_OSI.asp.

Alternative Therapies

Finding relief may mean combining pain medication with other forms of treatment. In some cases, these could replace the need for opioids or other drugs for some patients. These include:

- Heat and cold therapy
- Stretching
- Counseling and coaching
- Meditation, relaxation or stress-reduction training
- Exercise and weight loss
- Rehabilitation, occupational and physical therapy
- Massage, chiropractic care
- Acupuncture
- Injections, nerve stimulation
- Surgery
- Sleep management
- Mental health treatment



Managing Together

Veterans Helping Veterans Cope with Chronic Pain



Veterans talk about what's worked for them to manage pain during a Stanford Chronic Pain Self-Management Workshop at the Chillicothe VA Medical Center in Ohio.

• • • **Online Education: Chronic Pain Education for Veterans**

Developed by VA providers, this online class is tailored to your own experiences and beliefs about pain management. After completing the course, you receive a personal feedback report with suggestions on how to better manage pain and what to discuss with your providers. Get started at www.va.gov/ChronicPainMgmt/ChronicPainEducationforVeterans.

Managing chronic pain can feel isolating. Having others by your side going through similar situations can make a difference in your success. That's part of the philosophy behind the Stanford Chronic Pain Self-Management Program.

Developed by the Stanford Patient Education Research Center, these workshops run for six weeks in community settings all over the country. VISN 10 medical facilities now also offer these workshops to help Veterans and their caregivers deal with chronic pain.

The workshops happen once a week for two and a half hours. Two trained leaders facilitate the meetings. Both leaders either suffer from chronic pain themselves or have close relatives that do.

"Our Veteran leaders love doing it," says Nicole Najjar, Clinical Health Psychologist, Health Behavior Coordinator for the Battle Creek VA Medical Center. "I think the program speaks for itself. It's about being real and present with Veterans."

The workshops help patients who cannot reduce their pain any further with medications or surgery. Participants set a weekly action plan for ways they might improve their quality of life. Then, they learn how to carry out that plan. But the workshops' secret sauce is the Veteran-to-Veteran interaction.

Veterans are more likely than the average American to suffer from chronic pain. About 60 percent of those returning from active duty and 50 percent of older veterans suffer from chronic pain. Compare this with 30 percent of Americans nationwide.

"As we start to reduce opioids and have conversations with patients, hopefully we can reach people at the beginning of their pain management," says Najjar.

If you would like to sign up for a workshop in your area, talk to your VA health provider. In addition to chronic pain, there are workshops that deal with other types of chronic conditions, such as diabetes management. Find the group that's right for you.

• • • **Veteran-to-Veteran Workshops**

Sometimes the best way to manage chronic pain starts with talking to someone who's been there. The Chronic Pain Self-Management Program helps Veterans learn pain management strategies. In the process, they also discuss their challenges and successes with others. Read more about this in the article, "Managing Together," found on this page.

Mind Your Stress



Flashbacks to life-threatening and traumatic situations can cause many Veterans to deal with chronic stress and anxiety. Veterans that struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can feel debilitated. But VA medical researchers find simple meditation exercises, like mindfulness, can go a long way toward helping Veterans handle PTSD episodes.

How can it help me?

- Manage stress, anxiety, and depression
- Improve your emotional balance
- Manage PTSD in Veterans
- Reduce pain
- Improve eating habits

How do you do it?

- Find a place free from distraction.
- Focus your mind on your present circumstances. Pay attention to sounds and sensations.
- As thoughts pop into your mind, accept them and let them go without judging them.
- If a judgmental thought does come, make a mental note and then put it aside.
- Put aside any thoughts about past actions and any concerns about the future.
- Be kind to yourself; don't fret if you struggle to remain in the present moment.



What is mindfulness?

It is the practice of being fully aware of where you are and what you are doing. You allow thoughts to come and go without judging them. Doing this exercise daily can help reprogram your brain so it chooses different responses when it encounters stress.

VA Mindfulness Coach App

Get started on being more mindful! Download the VA Mindfulness Coach App and learn tips for making this a daily habit. Features include:



- Exercises, tools and information to help you practice mindfulness in your daily life
- Strategies to help overcome challenges to mindfulness practice
- Logs to track your mindfulness exercises and your progress
- Reminders to support your mindfulness practice

Go to mobile.va.gov/apps. Or, talk to your health care team.

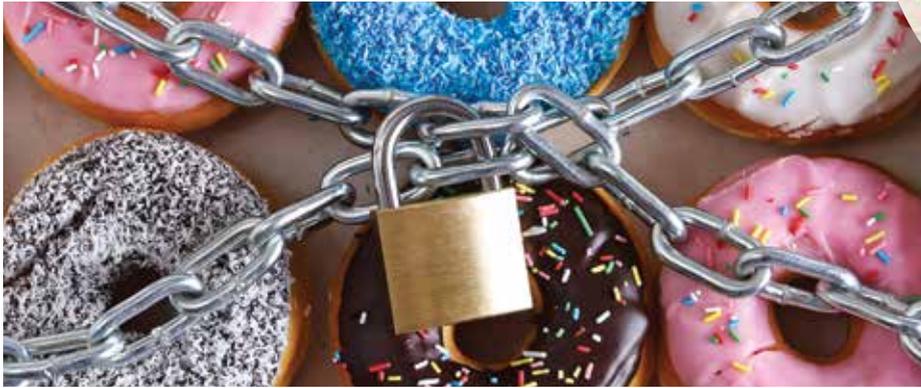
Meditation Makes Your Heart Happy

Meditation is good for reducing stress. But did you know it's also good for your heart? The American Heart Association says it can help in lowering blood pressure and managing heart disease. One study showed that Transcendental Meditation helped to reduce some African-Americans' risks for heart attack and stroke by almost 50 percent. The AHA reminds people that meditation should be done along with taking prescribed medications and following dietary and exercise programs, not as a replacement.



Sickeningly Sweet

Quit Your Love Affair with Sugar



Suffering from a sweet tooth? You're not alone. The average person eats as much as 150 pounds of sugar a year. Consider that people living in the early 1800s ate only about six pounds of sugar a year!

Processed foods with added sugars are a big part of the problem today. Read the Nutrition Facts label next time you pick up a loaf of bread at the store. You'll see sugar is almost always an added ingredient. In fact, you'll find some form of sugar added to most packaged and processed foods. They can add as much as 22 teaspoons of sugar (350 calories) to your diet every day.

Daily Sugar Limit



No more than 6 teaspoons (24 grams) a day of added sugar for women.



No more than 9 teaspoons (36 grams) a day of added sugar for men.

Many experts believe all this added sugar is raising our risks for type 2 diabetes, obesity and heart disease. Although raw sugar is a simple carbohydrate, our bodies don't really need it to function. We do need complex carbohydrates for energy and fiber. Get that from foods like whole grains, vegetables and fruits.



Be on the lookout for added sugars next time you shop. For instance, if a product has more than 5 grams of sugar per serving, consider choosing something else. Or better yet – go for whole foods like fresh fruit, vegetables and nuts. These have the highest nutritional content and usually the least amount of sugar. Healthy fats, such as avocados, coconut, nuts and seeds, can also help stabilize your blood sugar. This will help to reduce the number of sugar attacks you have in a day.



Other Names for Sugar

Manufacturers sneak sugar into their foods to enhance its flavor and color, add bulk and texture, and to prolong shelf-life. But, you might not recognize it as an ingredient when looking on the label. Check for these often-unrecognized names for sugar:

- Cane juice
- Sucrose
- Barley malt
- High-fructose corn syrup
- Maltose
- Malt syrup
- Dextrose
- Sorbitol
- Fruit juice concentrate

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Be There for the Vets in Your Life

The RAND Center for Military Health Policy Research reports that 20% of the Veterans who served in either Iraq or Afghanistan suffer from either major depression or post-traumatic stress disorder. Veterans who consider suicide often show the following signs:

- Appearing sad or depressed most of the time
- Having signs of clinical depression, such as deep sadness, loss of interest, trouble sleeping and eating—that doesn't go away or continues to get worse
- Feeling anxious or agitated
- Withdrawing from friends and family, or sleeping all the time
- Frequent mood changes
- Expressing feelings of excessive guilt or shame, failure or decreased performance
- Feeling that life is not worth living, having no sense of purpose in life
- Talking about feeling trapped—like there is no way out of a situation, or there's no solution to their problems



If you know someone who is struggling with depression or thoughts of suicide, help is only a phone call or text away! Contact the Veterans Crisis Line today for confidential help for Veterans and their families. There are three ways to connect:

- **CALL** 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1).
- **TEXT** to 838255
- **CHAT** at www.veteranscrisisline.net. Click on the red box that says "Confidential Veterans Chat" at the top of the screen.



To learn more about what the VA is doing to prevent Veteran suicide, visit www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention.