

Veterans

The VA MidSouth Healthcare Network Wellness Journal

Health Watch

Spring 2010

**It's spring!
Easy ways
to get fit**

**Medical
research at VA**

**Give your medicine
cabinet a makeover**





Caring for our women Veterans

Dear Veteran:

Our Veterans deserve the very best care—anything less is unacceptable. Each day, employees of the MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 9) uphold our obligation to Veterans—and that includes meeting the needs of women Veterans.

VA’s mission is to fulfill President Lincoln’s promise—“To care for him who shall have borne the battle ...”—by serving and honoring the men *and women* who are America’s Veterans.

Women constitute one of the fastest growing subpopulations of Veterans, second only to the elderly. The average age of women Veterans is 48, compared to an average age of 61 for male Veterans. Almost all newly enrolled women Veterans using VA health care are younger than 40. Our services are being tailored to meet the special needs of women Veterans.

Each of the VA Medical Centers in VISN 9 has at least one full-time Women Veterans Program Manager. If you have not met your VA Medical Center coordinator, take a few moments to do so. You will be pleasantly surprised at the gender-specific services and programs available to you.

Every effort is being made to provide women Veterans with:

- comprehensive primary care by a proficient and interested health care provider
- privacy, safety, dignity and sensitivity to gender-specific needs
- the right care, in the right place, at the right time
- state-of-the-art health care equipment and technology
- quality preventive and clinical care

Visit www.publichealth.va.gov/womenshealth/ and www.oefoif.va.gov/WhatCanVADoForMe.asp#ITEM5 for more information.

Thank you for your service.

John Dandridge Jr.
Network Director

Veterans Health Watch is a wellness journal published quarterly by the VA MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 9). *Veterans Health Watch* is designed to promote healthy lifestyles and give Veterans and their personal caregivers insightful information about managing and accessing health care from VA Medical Centers within VISN 9.

This publication is not a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor.

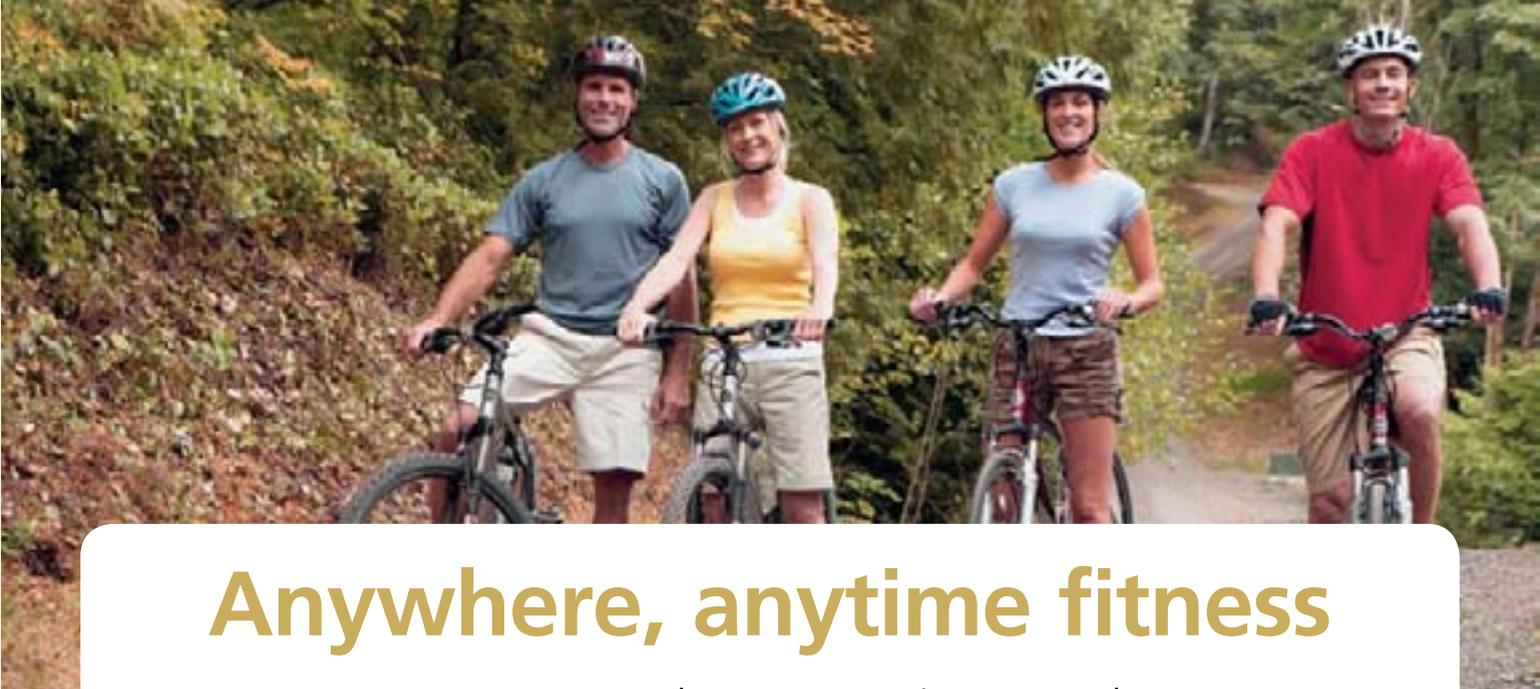
Your feedback is welcomed. If you would like to comment on any of the articles or submit information for possible publication, please write to:

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Anywhere, anytime fitness

10 ways to sneak movement into your day



When it comes to fitting fitness into your life, all you need is a little creativity and the desire to do your mind and body some good. Here are

some ideas to get you started:

Around the house

- 1 **Put some muscle into your housework.** Clean with vigor for an energy expenditure that gets your home sparkling and your heart pumping.
- 2 **Tend your garden.** Try your hand at gardening and landscaping. Plant, mow the lawn, pull up old shrubs and replace them with new ones.
- 3 **Go ahead, watch TV!** Just keep moving while you watch. Walk or march in place. Jump rope or climb stairs during commercials.
- 4 **Beautify your home.** Scrape away old paint and add a fresh coat. Sand and revarnish tired-looking furniture. Try hanging wallpaper yourself.

In the car

- 5 **Take a traffic break.** Don't let a jam—or a red light—get you down. Instead, do some muscle-strengthening exercises:
 - Firm your forearms by squeezing the steering wheel. Place hands at the 9 and 3 o'clock positions, and press arms inward.
 - If you're a woman, do Kegels to strengthen your pelvic floor. Tighten the muscles you use to control urination. Hold for five seconds and repeat 20 times.

At work

- 6 **Head for the halls.** Once or twice a day, take a two- to five-minute walk, longer if possible. Vary your routine by climbing stairs.
- 7 **Stop short.** If you take public transportation to work, leave home 10 minutes earlier and get off the bus or train a stop or two farther away than usual.

Around town

- 8 **Walk, don't drive.** The next time you have to pick up milk and the paper, walk or bike to the convenience store.

At the mall

- 9 **Take the pain out of parking.** Grab the spot farthest from the mall entrance (it definitely will be available!) and sneak in a brisk, healthy walk.
- 10 **Be a browser.** Take 10 minutes to walk around the entire mall, upper and lower levels if possible. Pretend escalators and elevators don't exist, and take the stairs. ■

→ Spring into fitness!

VA's *MOVE!* program can help you lose weight and get fit. For more information, visit www.move.va.gov.



Spring clean your medicine cabinet

By Mark A. Slagle, PharmD, BCPS,
VISN 9 Pharmacy Benefits Manager

A

ll over the country, Americans have started their spring cleaning. Clothes that no longer fit are donated to local charities. Broken toys are thrown out. Garages are emptied of junk. But have you ever thought about spring cleaning your medicine cabinet? Now's a good time to look at your medicines and get rid of any old or expired prescriptions.

Take stock

Look for disposal instructions on the patient information that came with your medicine.

■ **Don't flush medicines down the toilet unless specifically instructed to do so.** If no instructions are given, take old or expired medications out of their original bottles and mix them with used coffee grounds or kitty litter. This makes the medicine less appealing

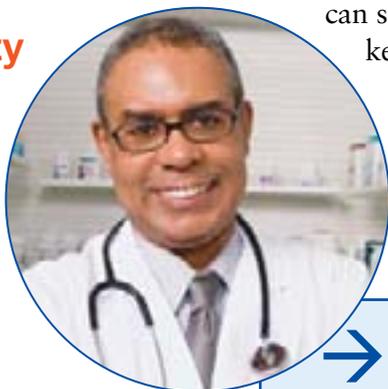
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to children, pets and people who might go through your trash.

■ **Place drugs in a sealed plastic bag, empty can or other container** to prevent the medicine from leaking or breaking through. Even though VA pharmacy does not take back medicines, some communities have drug take-back programs that allow you to bring medicines to a central location for proper disposal. Call your city or county government's household trash or recycling service (see the blue pages in your phone book) to see if a take-back program is available in your area.

Honesty is the best policy

Once you've cleaned out your medicine cabinet, review all the medicines you're taking. If you feel like you're taking too many medications or that your medicines aren't working well for you, discuss this with your VA primary care provider (PCP). Sometimes, people stop taking their medicines or change the way they take their medicines, but they don't say anything because they're afraid of upsetting or disappointing their PCP. This is a bad idea! It may be possible to reduce the number of medicines you take, but this is something you should discuss with your PCP first. Bring a list of all of the medicines, vitamins, herbs and other products you're taking to each PCP visit. Tell him or her exactly how you're taking your medicines, especially if you're not using them according to the instructions on the label.



You and your PCP need to have a complete and correct list of your medicines.

Inventory control

Sometimes you end up with medicine at home that just goes to waste. If you have too much of your medicine at home, let your PCP or pharmacist know. He or she can put your prescriptions on hold so that you don't receive refills you don't need. This will keep you from getting overstocked on your medicine again. When you need a refill, just let your pharmacist know a couple of weeks before you run out and he or she can send a refill right away. Another way to keep from getting too much medicine is to order your refills only when you need them instead of ordering all of your medicines at once. Again, order your refills about two weeks before you run out of medicine. Enjoy your spring cleaning! ■

→ Start fresh!

Remember these important points when doing your spring cleaning:

- Get rid of old medicines that you're not taking.
- Tell your PCP how you're taking your medicines.
- Talk to your PCP if you're having any problems with your medicines.
- Tell your PCP if you think you're taking too many medicines.
- Put your prescriptions on hold and ask for refills only when you need them.



Innovations in health care

Research programs at VA

Here's a sampling of the nearly 200 medical research projects currently under way at VA MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 9)

Medical Centers. Many of these projects, made possible by funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, are helping our dedicated scientists—many of whom are experts in their fields—to develop new treatments for our Veterans.

→ Tennessee Valley Healthcare System (TVHS) overhauls research facilities

The system's research facilities are undergoing a \$3.6 million renovation and will soon boast one of the most modern medical research labs in Tennessee. TVHS has received more than \$13 million in stimulus funding to provide improved health care services to its Veterans. The project incorporates many of the latest "green" technologies to maximize energy efficiency. It's scheduled to be completed in 2010.

→ Memphis VA Medical Center leads physician research studies

William C. Cushman, M.D., led VA's effort in the ALLHAT trial, the largest hypertension trial ever conducted, and the ACCORD trial, which studies the treatment of cardiovascular risks for those who have diabetes. He's received a \$15.27 million award from the National Institutes of Health to conduct the next large-scale hypertension trial, called SPRINT, at 23 VA Medical Centers across the country.

James B. Dale, M.D., has developed a new vaccine against group A *Streptococcus*, the bacterium that causes rheumatic fever, toxic shock syndrome and necrotizing fasciitis. It's currently in clinical trials in the United States and Canada.

Arnold E. Postlethwaite, M.D., will conduct the first human trials on a new rheumatoid arthritis treatment. Dr. Postlethwaite has received Food and Drug Administration certification for this drug.

→ Huntington VA Medical Center researchers study heart failure and hypertension

Research programs include 21 active protocols with 14 principal investigators, including participation in a major study about alternatives in anticoagulation therapy for heart failure. Pharmacology and medical studies include the treatment of hypertension, heart failure and diabetes.

→ Combating hepatitis C at Mountain Home VA Medical Center

Mountain Home VA Medical Center's research program has 65 active studies. One major project is studying the immunologic responses of patients to hepatitis C viral infection. The goal is to define the aspects of the immune response that are impaired during chronic hepatitis C infection in order to develop treatments to help a patient's immune system clear the virus from the body. ■

For every season, there is a sneeze

How to cope with year-round allergies

Springtime may be justly famous for allergies, but for many people, the misery of sniffles, sneezing and watery eyes doesn't end with the summer solstice. If you suffer from allergy symptoms throughout the year, chances are you have multiple allergies to irritants both indoors and out. Take these steps to help you cope:

- **Consider the culprits.** You may need a doctor to pinpoint and treat your allergies, but first try to see whether you can manage mild or occasional symptoms by using over-the-counter medications and avoiding environmental triggers. Dust, pets and mold are the biggest indoor offenders. If your symptoms are seasonal, however, you may be allergic to certain pollens. In the spring, the prevalent allergen is tree pollen. Summer brings grasses, and in the fall, weeds abound.

- **Explore over-the-counter treatments.**

Nonprescription antihistamines curb the body's actual allergic response and work best when you take them routinely. Decongestants may improve breathing. Don't use nose drops and sprays for more than three days because longer use may cause more harm. Eye drops can provide some temporary symptom relief.

- **Is it a vicious allergen or a virus?** While both can cause a runny nose, coughing and sneezing, allergies usually have a clear discharge and don't cause aches, pains or fever. Allergies may come on suddenly, but symptoms tend to linger through a season or more. Colds usually run their course within a week.

- **See your doctor.** See your health care provider if over-the-counter remedies and self-care measures don't offer relief, your symptoms worsen or you develop asthmalike reactions such as wheezing. You may need to see an allergist for skin testing or further treatment. ■

→ Controlling triggers

Reducing your contact with indoor and outdoor allergens may help make your symptoms more manageable. Try these measures:

- Limit contact with pets.
- Avoid carpets, which can trap dust and animal dander.
- Use a vacuum with a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filter.
- Run a HEPA purifier in your bedroom.
- Make sure basements, bathrooms and kitchens are well ventilated and cleaned frequently to prevent mold and mildew.
- Use a dehumidifier in damp basements.
- Keep windows closed and use air conditioning during peak pollen months.
- Stay indoors during peak pollen hours, from 5 to 10 a.m.
- Make your home a smoke-free environment.
- Avoid aerosols, paint, perfumes and cleaning products with strong fumes.





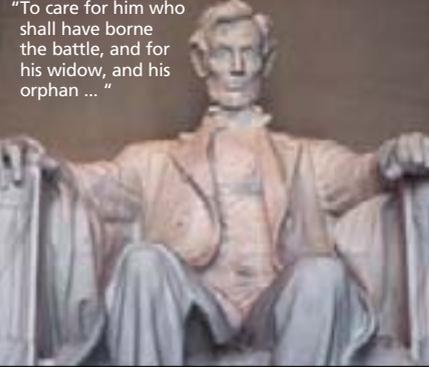
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Keeping the promise

"To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan ..."



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