

# Veterans

The VA MidSouth Healthcare Network Wellness Journal

# Health Watch

Summer 2007

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awareness month**

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your breath away**

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*MidSouth*  
Healthcare Network



## New clinics will enhance service options

### *Dear Veteran:*

**T**here is good news on two fronts. First, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has approved the opening of new community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs); second, there will be a new state-of-the-art medical facility at the Leestown Road Campus of the Lexington VA Medical Center.

Here in the VA MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 9), we are approved for the establishment of clinics in Berea, Daviess and Grayson Counties in Kentucky. The counties of Hawkins and Madison are approved for Tennessee. The new CBOCs should be completed by October 2008.

The master plan for the Leestown Campus at the Lexington center includes construction of a single-floor 60-bed nursing home, a 30-bed domiciliary and a new outpatient building to meet the current and anticipated needs of Kentucky veterans.

VA will also explore partnerships with the private sector to generate revenue by leasing under-used buildings at Leestown once the new facilities are completed and occupied.

The Leestown Campus decision was a result of the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) review process, designed to upgrade VA health care facilities across the country.

These announcements, which were made public in the spring, will ensure better access to services for our veterans. We are working every day to bring world-class health care closer to where veterans live, in facilities that will make us even more proud to serve you. While these major improvements won't happen overnight, we're excited that the future of health care for veterans within VISN 9 is in clear view and the future looks very bright.

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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# August is cataract awareness month

**M**ore than half of Americans by age 80 have been diagnosed with cataracts or had cataract surgery, according to the National Eye Institute.

A cataract is an age-related clouding of the crystalline eye lens. The lens is located inside the eye just behind the iris. As we age, this transparent lens becomes opaque, leading to impaired vision.

Researchers aren't sure what exactly causes cataracts, but chemical changes that occur in the lens over time likely play a role. By age 65, most people have some degree of lens clouding, although usually minor.

## What are the symptoms?

The following symptoms might mean that a cataract is forming, although the only way to know for sure is to have a complete eye exam. See an eye doctor if you experience:

- cloudy, fuzzy, foggy or filmy vision
- changes in the way you see colors
- problems driving at night because headlights seem too bright
- problems with sun glare
- frequent changes in your eyeglass prescription
- double vision
- temporary better vision in previously farsighted people (second sight)

## Prevent cataracts from developing

"There appears to be a correlation between smoking and cataract development, so that's another good reason to quit using tobacco products," says Donald Seibert, O.D., chief of optometry services at VA Medical Center in Huntington. "Ultraviolet [UV] radiation from the sun may also increase the rate of cataract progression, but wearing UV-blocking sunglasses will prevent UV light from reaching the crystalline lens."



Normal vision



Mild cataract



Advancing cataract



## Surgical solution

Cataract treatment often involves only a change in eyeglasses in mild cases. However, surgery may be needed if impaired vision is affecting your ability to function.

Cataract surgery is typically performed as an outpatient procedure under local anesthesia. The crystalline eye lens is removed and replaced with an implant. Vision improves within a short time after surgery. Complications are rare but may include bleeding or infection.

Although cataract surgery is safe, patients and their doctors should consider surgery only if glasses or other aids do not help and the patient's everyday functions are compromised significantly. ■

## Schedule an eye exam today!\*

**Huntington Eye Clinic**  
(304) 429-6741,  
ext. 2886/3886

**Lexington Ophthalmology Clinic**  
(859) 233-4511,  
ext. 4479/4117

**Lexington Optometry Clinic**  
(859) 233-4511,  
ext. 3604/3801

**Louisville Eye Clinic**  
(502) 287-4811

**Memphis Optometry Clinic**  
(901) 523-8990,  
ext. 5550

**Mountain Home Eye Clinic**  
(423) 926-1171, ext. 7283

**Murfreesboro Eye Clinic**  
(615) 867-6000,  
ext. 3743

**Nashville Eye Clinic**  
(615) 327-4751,  
ext. 5669

\* A referral from your primary care physician may be required.

# Clearing the air

Don't let COPD take your breath away



**D**ay and night, our lungs expand and contract without needing any reminders. In fact, most of the time we don't even realize we're breathing. However, for those who suffer from chronic bronchitis and emphysema, breathing is a constant concern.

Because both conditions commonly occur together, they've been classified under the term chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). The more you know about COPD, the sooner you'll be able to spot symptoms and get treatment.

"Smoking is one of the biggest risk factors for COPD," says Nancy Munn, M.D., chief of pulmonary section at VA Medical Center in Huntington. In fact, smoking causes 80 percent to 90 percent of all COPD cases.

## Move it to use it

If you have trouble getting enough air when you're just cleaning around the house, you may fear that exercise is out of your reach. But physical activities such as walking will teach your body how to use less oxygen more efficiently. That means you'll be able to do the same amount of work with less air. Here are some tips:

- 1** Before you start, clear your lungs of mucus by coughing.
  - 2** Practice deep breathing before and during the activity. Counting as you breathe can help. Breathe in: 1-2. Breathe out: 1-2-3-4.
  - 3** If you feel short of breath at any time, stop and relax for a few minutes, then continue.
  - 4** The best times for people with COPD to exercise are in the morning and in late afternoon or evening after their lungs are cleared of mucus.
- Before you start any sort of exercise program, talk to your health care provider.

## Chronic bronchitis

Otherwise known as "smoker's cough," chronic bronchitis is marked by a frequent cough. Common symptoms also include increased mucus, frequent clearing of the throat and shortness of breath.

Chronic bronchitis occurs when the bronchial tubes



## Pace yourself

**P**eople with COPD say that pacing their activities and knowing their limits are key to living well. If you have COPD, try to:

■ **Listen to your body.** If you wake up feeling supercharged, try tackling the project you saved for an energetic day. On the other hand, if you feel as if your batteries are running a little low, take it easy.

■ **Tune into when you feel your best—and take advantage.** For many people, that's soon after they've taken their medicine or had a breathing treatment.

become irritated and inflamed, decreasing the amount of air that can flow in and out of the lungs. If the bronchial tubes have been irritated for a long time, then excess mucus is produced, the tubes thicken and an irritating cough develops. The situation can get dangerous if airflow is hampered.

**Causes and treatment:** Cigarette smoking is the most common cause of chronic bronchitis. Treatment involves drugs designed to relax and open up air passages (called bronchodilators). And, of course, if smoking is related to the condition, patients are instructed to quit.

## Emphysema

More than 3.6 million people in the United States have been diagnosed with emphysema—91 percent of whom are over age 45—according to the American Lung Association.

Emphysema develops when a chemical imbalance in the lungs causes the walls of the air sacs to lose their elasticity and break. Since the air sacs are responsible for trading the oxygen in the air for the blood's carbon dioxide, damage to the sacs causes the lungs to work harder to get more air to the body, causing shortness of breath. The loss of elasticity also makes exhaling difficult.

**Causes and treatment:** As with chronic bronchitis, smoking is a major cause of emphysema. Some people have chronic bronchitis before developing emphysema. Although quitting smoking can stop the progression of the disease, it cannot cure emphysema. Other treatments include bronchodilator drugs, corticosteroids, antibiotics, oxygen therapy and aerobic exercise to strengthen lung muscles and to teach the heart how to work more efficiently. ■





## It's not the heat

How humidity affects your heart

**H**ot weather can lead to dehydration, heat exhaustion and heat stroke, but the dangers increase when you add humidity to the mix. When the temperature rises above 70° F and the humidity registers more than 70 percent, you need to be on the alert.

### Who's most at risk?

People with high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease or kidney disease are most vulnerable to the effects of humid conditions, as are those over age 50. Other risk factors that can affect your body's ability to cool itself include being obese; having poor circulation; following a salt-restricted diet; drinking alcohol; having inefficient sweat

glands; and taking diuretics, sedatives, tranquilizers or heart or blood pressure medication.

"Individuals who are at risk should discuss the potential impact of exercise and medication on their health with their physicians," says Joseph A. Pellecchia, M.D., FACP, chief of staff and cardiologist at VA Medical Center in Huntington.

### Exercising in humid weather

Since you generate heat during exercise, humidity can affect your heart rate when you work out, even at cooler temperatures. Your body cools itself by sweating—but only if sweat can evaporate. In humid weather, sweat evaporates more slowly, so your body temperature continues to rise.

What's more, fluid loss from sweating decreases your blood volume. So while your heart is still working to cool you off, it must also work harder and faster to get that smaller amount of blood to your working muscles. That's why it's always important to replenish the fluids you lose by drinking plenty of water while you exercise.

### Learn the warning signs

Recognize the signs of heat stress and take immediate action. Headache, fatigue, profuse sweating, muscle spasms or cramps, cold and clammy skin and swollen ankles and feet can mean you're getting too hot. Move to a cool or air-conditioned area, drink fluids, shower in cool water and lie down.

Seek emergency medical help if symptoms don't improve or if they progress to include nausea, dizziness, confusion, rapid pulse, high fever, fainting or warm, dry skin with no sweating.

### Prevention is key

Pay attention to weather reports. Heat disorders can occur any time the temperature and humidity both rise above 70° F and 70 percent respectively, or the heat index is greater than 80° F. Drink plenty of fluids, avoid caffeine and alcohol (they're dehydrating), limit activity to a cooler hour and wear light-colored clothing made of natural fabrics. ■



# Secretary Nicholson praises SBA's Patriot Express loans

**N**early a quarter of newly discharged veterans consider starting their own businesses.

Now, the Small Business Administration (SBA) has unveiled a new program called Patriot Express that offers a wide variety of assistance to veterans interested in setting up or expanding their own small businesses.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson praises the SBA venture that will make business ownership easier for veterans. "America's veterans are a great resource for the private sector," says Nicholson. "I commend Administrator Steve Preston of the Small Business Administration for his initiative in helping veterans transition back into the private sector."

## What are the benefits?

Assistance under the new SBA program for veterans ranges from help with writing a business plan and managing a business to obtaining financing and learning how to export goods. Participants may also qualify for loans between

2.25 percent and 4.75 percent over the prime interest rate.

## Eligibility

Patriot Express loans are open to veterans, reservists, National Guard members, current spouses of eligible personnel, the surviving spouses of service members who died on active duty or spouses of veterans who died from a service-related disability.

## Nicholson's involvement

Secretary Nicholson chairs a presidential task force on the needs of returning veterans that recommended the expansion of veteran eligibility for the new SBA Patriot Express program. Nicholson delivered the panel's report to the White House on April 23. ■



**Learn more!**

For more information about the SBA Patriot Express program, visit [www.sba.gov/patriotexpress](http://www.sba.gov/patriotexpress).

# VA MidSouth Healthcare Network

The right care,  
the right place,  
the right time

## KENTUCKY

### VA Medical Center

1101 Veterans Drive  
Lexington, KY 40502  
(859) 233-4511  
Toll free (Kentucky only):  
1-888-824-3577

### VA Medical Center

800 Zorn Avenue  
Louisville, KY 40206  
(502) 287-4000  
Toll free: 1-800-376-8387



## WEST VIRGINIA

### VA Medical Center

1540 Spring Valley Drive  
Huntington, WV 25704  
(304) 429-6741  
(304) 429-6755  
Toll free: 1-800-827-8244

## TENNESSEE

### James H. Quillen VA Medical Center

PO Box 4000  
Corner of Sidney and Lamont  
Mountain Home, TN 37684  
(423) 926-1171  
Toll free: 1-877-573-3529

### VA Medical Center

1030 Jefferson Avenue  
Memphis, TN 38104  
(901) 523-8990  
Toll free: 1-800-636-8262

### VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System

Alvin C. York Campus  
3400 Lebanon Pike  
Murfreesboro, TN 37129  
(615) 867-6000  
Toll free: 1-800-876-7093

### Nashville Campus

1310 24th Avenue South  
Nashville, TN 37212  
(615) 327-4751  
Toll free: 1-800-228-4973



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