

Veterans

The VA MidSouth Healthcare Network Wellness Journal

Health Watch

Spring 2007



**Stay flexible
with age**

Polytrauma care

**Your guide
to healthy skin**

Visit us online!





Addressing environment of care issues

Dear Veteran:

Without a doubt, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is being watched closely in the wake of the Department of Defense (DoD) Walter Reed Army Medical Center environment of care issues. While VA is a stand-alone cabinet-level administration and Walter Reed is an arm of the DoD, VISN 9 facilities were also scrutinized.

I asked each medical center director in VISN 9 to create teams and complete a thorough evaluation and assessment of the environment of care our veterans see daily and to provide me with the results. There were no substantial issues within the halls and walls of our VA medical centers.

There were some opportunities for improvement, however, these were due to normal wear on buildings and furnishings that one would expect with the usage level we experience and the age of our buildings. Although the environment of care issue has generated much congressional and media attention in our area, we were able to publicly demonstrate what fine work goes on in VISN 9 medical centers every day.

I cannot stress enough how proud I am of the work being done in VISN 9 facilities and the general cleanliness and appearance of our halls and walls. Our desire is to make you, our veterans, feel safe and comfortable when you enter any of our buildings for care. I know from my visits to the medical centers that our staff takes pride in their work environment.

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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Polytrauma care

Helping veterans cope

Specialized VA medical centers can provide comprehensive polytrauma care for veterans and returning service members. Polytrauma signifies injuries, one of which may be life-threatening, to more than one physical region or organ system, which results in physical, cognitive, psychological or psychosocial impairment and functional disability.

Some examples of polytrauma include:

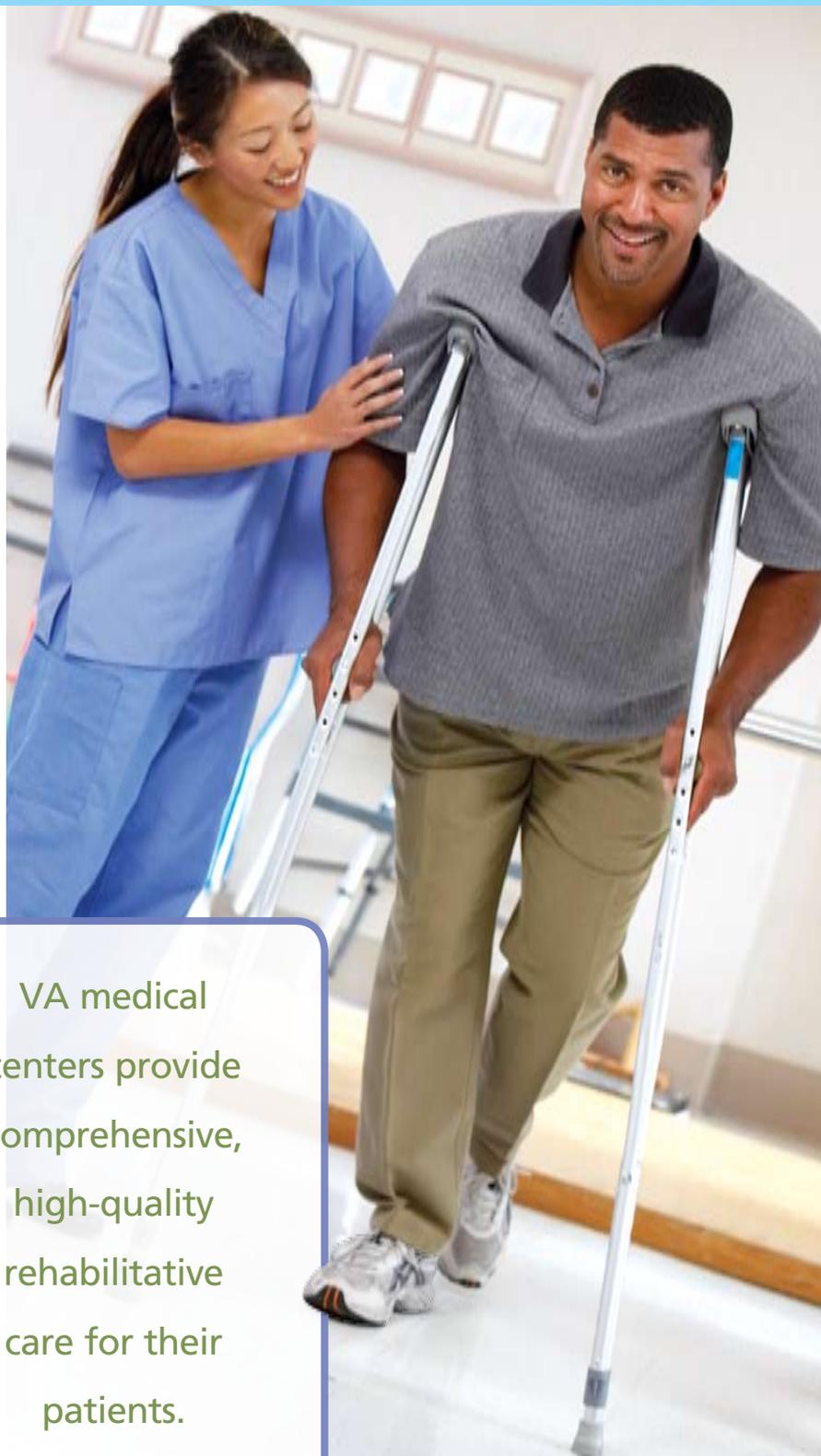
- traumatic brain injury
- hearing loss
- amputations
- fractures
- burns
- visual impairment

Comprehensive polytrauma care

In January 2005, the Department of Veterans Affairs established four polytrauma rehabilitation centers at VA medical centers in Tampa, Fla.; Palo Alto, Calif.; Minneapolis, Minn.; and Richmond, Va. The network polytrauma site for the VISN 9 region is the VA Medical Center in Lexington, Ky.

VA medical centers provide comprehensive, high-quality, interdisciplinary care for their patients. Teams of physicians from every relevant field administer individually tailored rehabilitation plans to help patients recover as fully as possible.

For more information, visit the VA polytrauma Web site through your local VA Web site. ■



VA medical centers provide comprehensive, high-quality rehabilitative care for their patients.



Skin signs

Your guide to healthy skin

Considering all the wear and tear skin gets—exposure to the elements, washing and drying, squinting and smiling—it’s remarkably resilient. However, an illness or external irritant can cause a bump, spot or rash to show up somewhere on the body. Usually harmless, changes in the skin sometimes require medical attention. This guide will show you what to look for and what to do about it.

Skin smarts

Here are some tips to maintain healthy skin:

■ **Avoid the sun.** Sun exposure causes skin cancer, wrinkles and age spots. Wear a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or more.

■ **Eat right.** Make sure your diet has enough protein and is low in saturated fat and cholesterol.

■ **Drink plenty of water.** Plenty means eight 8-ounce servings a day.

■ **Don’t smoke and avoid smoky areas.** Breathing smoke is associated with wrinkles and poor circulation.

■ **Watch your skin carefully.** A bump, crusted area, lesion or mole that has grown or changed in character could be a sign of skin cancer. If caught early, skin cancers are almost always curable.

Skin sign	What it may mean	What you should do
a scaly red spot; a change in a mole; any new skin growth; bleeding in a mole or other growth	skin cancer	see your health care provider immediately
a cut that fails to heal	skin cancer, circulatory problems, diabetes	see your health care provider immediately
a new, dark, crusty mole-like spot	seborrheic keratosis	no treatment is required, but your care provider might want to examine the growth to rule out a more serious condition
a very painful, blistery rash on one side of the body	shingles, a viral nerve infection	see your health care provider immediately; antiviral medication can help if given early; painkillers and a soothing ointment also help
a flaky, itchy rash that merges into the surrounding skin	eczema	keep the affected skin clean and dry; don’t use harsh soaps; if rash persists, see your health care provider
persistent itching without a rash	an underlying disorder, such as liver disease, diabetes, kidney failure, blood disorders or thyroid disease	see your health care provider; a nonprescription, unscented moisturizer can help soothe skin, as may compounds that contain menthol or eucalyptus
a red, blistery rash that oozes, scabs and scales	contact dermatitis, which may be caused by cosmetics, plants, metal compounds and chemicals used in clothing manufacture	identify and avoid the trigger; keep the area clean and covered with dry bandages; corticosteroid creams can relieve mild dermatitis; see your health care provider if severe

Staying flexible

with age



our physical flexibility doesn't have to decline with age. Performing a regular stretching routine can restore muscle tone and help you move more freely. An added bonus: You'll have fewer aches and pains and less chance of injury.

Below are some simple stretches recommended by The National Institute on Aging to help improve your flexibility. Be sure to get your doctor's permission before doing any stretches, especially if you've had a hip replacement or another procedure that may limit your range of motion.

Don't forget to warm up first by taking a walk or marching in place. Hold stretches for at least 10 to 30 seconds. Repeat three to five times, but stop if you feel any pain.

Wrist stretch

Seated or standing, place hands together as though you're praying. Slowly lift your elbows so your lower arms are parallel to the floor, keeping your hands in position.

Hamstring stretch

Stand behind a chair that has an upright back. Fully extend your arms in front of you to grasp the chair back with both hands. Bend forward from your hips until your back is parallel with the floor. Keep your back flat, not rounded, during the movement. You'll feel this in the back of your thighs.



Hip rotation

Lie on your back on the floor. Bend your knees and place your feet flat on the floor. Lower one knee to the side while keeping your pelvis and opposite leg stable. Hold the position, then return to the start position. Repeat with the other leg.

Exercise caution

Remember to consult your doctor for any conditions or limitations that might prevent you from performing these stretching exercises.



FUNGUS FACTS

What you need to know about nail fungus infections

Did you know?

Important facts about nail fungus infections:

- A nail fungus infection won't go away on its own.
- Left alone, the infection can cause pain, disrupt activities and may even spread to other nails.
- Nail fungus can lead to bacterial infections in other parts of the body.
- Covering your nails with nail polish or hiding your nails in socks or shoes can actually help the infection spread by giving it a warm, moist environment.
- People with diabetes need to be especially careful because they are three times more likely to get a nail fungus infection. If not treated effectively, the infection can lead to more severe health problems.



Have your nails changed in color or gotten so thick that they're hard to trim? Do they cause you discomfort, pain or tenderness? If so, you could

have onychomycosis—or, as it's more commonly called, a nail fungus infection.

More than 35 million people in the United States have nail fungus. The fungus consists of tiny organisms called dermatophytes that can infect fingernails and toenails. A fungus infection lives in the nail bed deep beneath the nail. The nail bed provides a safe place for fungus to grow. That's why it's so hard to cure nail fungus. As time passes, the infection can worsen and may cause pain or tenderness.

The agony of de-feet

Nail fungus most often afflicts toenails. Socks and shoes keep toenails dark, warm and moist, creating

perfect places for fungus to grow. These organisms thrive in moist environments, such as shower stalls, bathrooms or locker rooms.

Stopping the spread

Nail fungus can sometimes spread from one nail to another or from one person to another. It may also be passed along when you share a nail file or clippers with someone who has a nail infection.

Primary care physicians, podiatrists, dermatologists, physician assistants and nurse practitioners can all diagnose and prescribe treatments for nail fungus infections. Tell your doctor if your nails are causing you pain. Your doctor will also need to know if you've used any medicines, creams, ointments, polishes or other medications for nail fungus. Ask for an effective treatment so you can start growing healthy nails again.

How fungus happens

You can develop a nail fungus infection if:

- you stubbed your toe and damaged the nail
- you cracked a fingernail or trimmed it too close
- your bare feet came into contact with the floor of a locker room, shower or pool area where someone with an infection recently stood
- you shared a nail file, emery board or nail clippers with someone who has had an infection

Damaging your nail gives fungus an opening to get under it and grow. The sooner you visit your doctor for diagnosis and treatment, the sooner you can stop the infection from getting worse and get your nails back on the right track.

Visit us online!

VA medical centers are now online to help make your VA experience more convenient. Our Web sites are designed with veterans in mind and contain useful information to help you navigate your way through services and benefits.

In addition to accessing up-to-date, helpful information, you can enroll for care, make or change an appointment, get driving directions, access MyHealthVet and much more. Visit us online today!



Check us out!

Huntington VA Medical Center: www.huntington.va.gov/

Lexington VA Medical Center: www.lexington.va.gov/

Louisville VA Medical Center: www.louisville.va.gov/

Memphis VA Medical Center: www.memphis.va.gov/

James H. Quillen VA Medical Center, Mountain Home: www.mountainhome.va.gov/

VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System, Murfreesboro/Nashville: www.tennesseevalley.va.gov/

VA MidSouth Healthcare Network

The right care,
the right place,
the right time.



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