

PREVENTIVE HEALTH CARE

By Joan Moore-Sheehan, R.N.
Ambulatory Care Quality Manager

As many of the leading causes of death and disability in the United States can be prevented, the message is simple: deliver preventive care to help keep people healthy and save lives.¹ The choices you make about the way you live are important to your health.

The Role of Prevention in VA Health Care

There is greater interest in health promotion and healthy lifestyles on the part of the veteran and in response to this the VA has developed a set of core preventive services.

How Does Preventive Health Care Differ From Traditional Care provided by the VA?

Traditional care has routinely been delivered with the idea of responding to a patient's need for treatment of a specific concern. Preventive care, however, is designed to offer education, screening tests, counseling, and immunizations during each scheduled VA visit. The goal is to prevent disease and to recognize potential problems prior to them becoming major diseases. This care is provided in addition to the specific concern for which the patient is

scheduled to see a health care provider. The preventive care is provided during each scheduled visit and involves support staff asking questions to learn if the veteran has received the above preventive measures to



L to R: Anna Decker, PCA, Diamond Clinic; Dennis Todd (patient), Minerva Bacini, RN, Diamond Clinic

What Types of Preventive Care Are Offered At Carl Hayden VA?

The VA offers preventive care in four areas:

- **Immunizations** to prevent disease: influenza vaccine, pneumonia vaccine, and tetanus/diphtheria immunizations.
- **Screening tests** for early detection of disease: breast, cervical, colorectal and prostate cancer screening; hepatitis C screening
- **Monitoring** of known chronic diseases such as: hypertension, congestive heart failure, ischemic heart disease, pulmonary disease, and diabetes mellitus.
- **Counseling** for risk reduction in areas such as: tobacco and other substance abuse cessation, depression, physical activity, weight control and medication use.

maintain an optimal level of health. If not contraindicated, the veteran will be offered whatever preventive care is due at the time of the visit.

For More Information

The more you know about and partake in preventive care, the more likely you are to remain in a state of health allowing you to live life to its fullest potential. Be sure to ask your provider about preventive care available to you during each visit.

Additionally, you will find brochures in each clinic related to various preventive services offered. The VA Library located on the third floor (Room 3114) has a wide variety of health related information, including five computers dedicated to veteran health education. For those with home web access, log onto www.myhealth.va.gov to locate researched prevention and wellness guides.

¹ VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (NCP), in collaboration with the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)

THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT at the Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center is conducting a diabetes prevention study. They are looking for men and women that are at risk for developing diabetes (but do not have diabetes now) and are ready to act now to prevent diabetes. If you are 18 years of age or older and have a family history of diabetes or have risk factors (e.g., overweight, Hispanic, Asian Indian ethnicity, or abnormal lipid levels) that increase your chances of developing diabetes, and would be interested in learning more and participating in a three and a half year diabetes prevention study that will be using an already FDA-approved medication, then contact one of the following individuals at **602-277-5551: Aneta Baloiu at ext. 5195, Linda McDonald at ext. 7063, or Dewayne Thurmond at ext. 5050.**

DID YOU KNOW that a VA billing call center is available to answer your billing questions? Trained and friendly VA Health Revenue Center staff in Topeka, Kansas can assist you with your VA billing statement questions. A new computer system will allow them to view your billing records and get the information they need to answer your questions quickly. You can call toll free **1-866-802-6819** Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

Beware of Secret Diet Killers

Psssssst! Have you heard? Secret Diet Killers are waiting to sabotage your weight loss efforts. Here are just a few of them:

1. MAKING FAVORITE FOODS FORBIDDEN

Weight loss does not mean deprivation. If you love pizza, eat it once a month instead of once a week. Eat two pieces instead of four. Denying yourself pleasure will lead to failure.

2. OVEREATING DIET FOOD

Switching to low-fat or low-calorie foods is smart, but remember to eat sensibly. Consuming an entire bag of reduced fat cookies will not help you achieve your goal.

3. FORGETTING LITTLE BITES

If you're tracking food intake, don't forget little nibbles and "tastes" of cookie batter, spaghetti sauce, and homemade salad dressing. Every bite contains fat or calories, so every bite counts!

4. AIMING FOR ZERO

Dieters often try to reduce calories as much as possible. While you may need to decrease caloric intake, don't attempt to avoid *all* calories. The human body *requires* a certain amount of fat and sugar. Ask your doctor how many calories you need each day and plan meals accordingly.

5. OBSESSING ABOUT THE SCALES

On a sensible weight loss plan, you may only lose one or two pounds each week. Daily weights fluctuate, so don't climb on the scales each morning to measure your progress. Seeing the dial move up even one pound can be disappointing enough to cause some people to give up.

6. SWEARING OFF SOLIDS

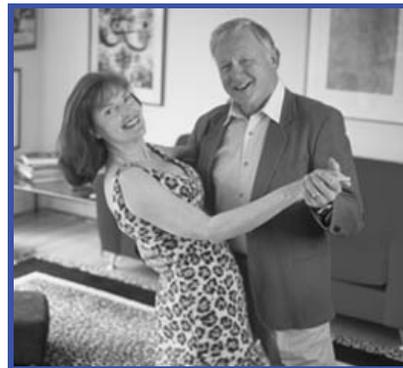
Never, ever go on a so-called liquid diet or consume diet drinks in lieu of solid food. Your body is not able to function properly without a variety of vitamins and minerals, and the best way to get them is through healthy meals.

Be on the lookout for these and other Diet Killers. Your ability to recognize them puts you a step closer to achieving your goals.

Most Lower Back Pain is Avoidable

People who suffer from lower back pain have something in common with their physician: frustration! Why is treating such a common malady so difficult?

Most back pain is caused by weak muscles, excess weight, lack of exercise, or poor posture. Muscle spasms in the back cause pain, and the prolonged pain induces additional spasms. The cycle continues - sometimes for weeks - and occasionally extends into the buttocks, upper legs, and hips. But doctors who can't find any actual nerve damage can only suggest rest or lifestyle changes, and perhaps prescribe pain medication.



Back pain sufferers usually adhere to an initial rest period, but they are often reluctant to do what is necessary to prevent future injuries. Most physicians recommend exercises to strengthen lower back and abdominal muscles, and regular stretching to increase flexibility. Some patients also need to lose weight, while others just need to practice good posture!

What can you do to lessen your chance of a lower back injury?

- Avoid repetitive or sustained bending over.
- Use a carrier for luggage, briefcases, or bags normally carried on the shoulder.
- Avoid awkward or unbalanced postures like sitting with weight shifted to one side, crossing your legs at the knees while sitting, or carrying your wallet in your back pocket.
- Sit up straight.
- Lose weight if you need to.
- Find someone to help with heavy awkward objects, or use a jack or dolly to lift and move items.
- Get plenty of rest on a mattress with adequate support.

Estimates indicate that four out of five adults will experience significant lower back pain sometime during their life. Avoid becoming a statistic, and you'll avoid the frustration of a long, slow recovery from this painful ailment.

MEDICAL TOOLBOX:

X-rays Help Doctors Diagnose & Treat Illness

Patients used to be concerned about radiation exposure from x-rays. Today's radiological procedures, however, safely take pictures that play an important role in the diagnosis and treatment of your illness. X-rays look like a photographic negative. A special doctor called a radiologist interprets the picture and sends the results to your physician.

- **X-rays** are the most common radiological test, and some people use the term generically to describe other radiological procedures. X-rays commonly diagnose broken bones.
- **Bone densitometry**, a quick and painless test, shows whether a patient has a loss of bone mass, which makes older adults prone to fractures.
- After a dye is administered through an IV, an **intravenous pyelogram (IVP)** reveals kidney stones, an enlarged prostate, or a tumor.

- A **barium enema** is an x-ray of the colon and large intestine. The procedure sounds unpleasant, but it saves lives by revealing cancer, polyps, and diverticulitis (a bulge in the colon).
- An **upper GI (gastrointestinal)** reveals the esophagus, stomach, and small intestine after the patient drinks a special fluid. It allows diagnosis of ulcers, cancer, or intestinal blockage.
- **Pelvic sonograms** use sonar to detect abnormalities in an unborn baby. They can also reveal cysts or tumors in the pelvic area.
- A **mammogram** is a special breast x-ray that helps detect breast cancer early, often before a patient even feels a lump.
- During a **CT scan**, you lie very still while a machine takes pictures, usually of just one area (brain, chest, abdomen, etc.). Often it helps your doctor diagnose central nervous system disorders.

Other types of radiological procedures also help diagnose and treat diseases. Ask your doctor if you have any questions about why radiological procedures are ordered for you or how they are administered.

Parkinson's Disease Strikes All Age Groups

Parkinson's Disease (PD) affects approximately one million people in the United States. It is a neurological disorder (sometimes called a movement disorder) that progressively worsens. Certain brain cells quit producing dopamine, a chemical that carries messages about movement and balance. The resulting symptoms can be hard to detect at first because they are so subtle, but over time they increase and are hard to miss. Not all patients have all symptoms but common ones include:

- **Tremor in one or both hands, arms, legs, or face.**
- **Slowness of movement or stiff body parts (arms, legs).**
- **Difficulty initiating or maintaining movements.**
- **Balance instability or poor posture.**
- **Lack of facial expression.**

Ongoing research has led to highly effective treatments. Drugs that mimic dopamine bring amazing results, and surgical procedures work wonders at helping some people control symptoms.

Other treatments seem to help, too. Physical therapy builds strength and keeps muscles flexible, while speech exercises make it easier to talk. Counseling helps PD patients work through emotional swings common with the disorder, and many people say support groups help them maintain a positive attitude.

Parkinson's can strike at any age, and for those learning to live with PD, several organizations offer help through brochures, videos, and referral services:

Parkinson's Disease Foundation, Inc.
1-800-457-6676

The National Parkinson Foundation
1-800-433-7022

The American Parkinson Disease Association, Inc.
1-800-223-2732

MyHealthVet: A New and Exciting Web-Based Program

By Spencer Ralston, MPA
Associate Director, SAVAHCS - Tucson

On Veterans Day of 2003, the VA proudly announced the launch of a new online website known as “MyHealthVet” where veterans, family, and VA clinicians can come together to optimize health care. This website offers perhaps the most advanced system for patient education and interaction available anywhere in this country.

By entering the worldwide web address www.myhealthvet.va.gov the veteran, his or her family members, and VA staff can register and access important and interesting health news and information. In Phase 1 of MyHealthVet, a vast health education library maintained by HealthGate offers MHV registrants the ability to search for information on virtually anything related to health, medical conditions, and drugs. A link to “Healthy Living Calculators” helps registrants assess their health status. A link to “Rx Checker” lets patients who are taking multiple medications be sure those medications are not adversely interacting with each other. Links to the “Women’s Health Guide” and the “Men’s Health Guide” offer comprehensive quick-reference guides to health conditions and medical procedures.

Phase 2 (scheduled to be online this summer) will be a tremendous addition to the MHV program. With this enhancement, VA-enrolled patients will have the ability to order their prescription refills online. They will also be able to view their co-payment balance and next scheduled appointment. Additionally, VA patients will be able to enter certain health information (such as weight), and even keep

a personal calendar. Eventually patients will be able to add such information as their blood pressure and blood glucose levels. All of this self-entered data will help the veteran and (if desired) his or her family and provider monitor progress in maintaining or improving health status.

Finally, in Phase 3 (which is expected to be rolled out during the winter of 2005), veteran patients will have the ability to view parts of their medical record, and share this information with those they designate – for example their spouse, children, community providers, etc. Also being developed is a way to allow two-way communication online between patients and providers.

Here are some interesting statistics: As of February 2004, over 15,000 people have registered for an MHV account. The

website averages 4,300 visits a day – with 70 percent of those coming from America Online (AOL) subscribers. The top five visiting states are California, Virginia, Texas, Georgia and Illinois. And, while close to 99 percent of all visitors were from the United States, there were visitors from such countries as Germany, the Netherlands, Canada, the United Kingdom, South Korea, Nigeria, Japan, Australia, China, and Spain.

For our patients, MyHealthVet offers a way to become a knowledgeable partner with physicians and nurses in terms of care and treatment. MyHealthVet is of great benefit to veterans, their families, and VA employees, and is just one more way that the Department of Veterans Affairs is providing high quality care to America’s heroes and heroines.

www.myhealthvet.va.gov

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For patient concerns or issues, contact our patient representatives at 602-277-5551, ext. 7394

602-222-6508

Cart T. Hayden VA Medical Center
Ambulatory Care

To change your address, contact:

For professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your healthcare provider.
Health Trends is designed to provide general health and wellness information and news about services provided by VISA 18. Health Trends is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be

If you are a veteran who is currently smoking and would like to learn ways to stop this habit, help is available through the Cart T. Hayden VAMC. Please contact your primary care provider and request a consultation to the Smoking Cessation Program.

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6550 E. Indian School Road
Phoenix, AZ 85012