



a message from the

*Program
Manager*



1. See your provider at least yearly and know your numbers: Cholesterol, blood pressure and A1C (diabetes).

2. Get at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise every day - you can break it down in 10 minute segments. Do a little more each day to increase your stamina.

3. Be pro-active and be a partner in your health. If you see outside physicians, please ensure that your VA provider gets copies of your studies and labs so that they can be entered into your electronic medical record for better continuity of care.

4. Get your flu shot yearly and your pneumonia vaccination if you are in a high risk group.

for the first year or two after menstruating has stopped.

Facial hair growth is a result of a change in the levels of estrogen and testosterone. Another complaint that women may experience is vaginal dryness. With the significant drop in estrogen after menopause, the membranes of the vagina thin, lose elasticity and decrease their production of lubricating fluids. Sexual intercourse may be uncomfortable or even painful. If you haven't had a baseline dexa-scan, you may consider it

now in an effort to head off osteoporosis. Maintaining bone health and muscle strength will enhance your quality of life and perhaps prevent fractures.

While it can feel like you're at the mercy of your body, there are things you can do to minimize the impact of hormone fluctuations. Nutrition and exercise play a pivotal role in the health of women after menopause. It may mean being disciplined enough to make a significant change in your lifestyle, but you'll feel the results of your efforts. You should also start taking a multivitamin that is rich in Vitamin D, magnesium and folic acid. Vitamin D will help your body to absorb vitamins and minerals, especially bone-building calcium that is so important. If you are battling night sweats, then take a cool shower before bed, wear cotton clothing to absorb sweat and keep yourself comfortable and dress in layers so you can remove clothing as you get hot. It may sound funny, but standing in front of the freezer or refrigerator will make you feel better.

There are many things to love about being post menopausal. There is a light at the end of the tunnel of hot flashes and night sweats. Try to think of this time as an opportunity to make positive changes in your life. Take a class, become more physically active, learn to paint or play an instrument. There are so many good things about no longer having "the curse." Work with your provider to control your physical symptoms and depend on the support of your family and friends to cushion the emotional symptoms. You may even find this to be the "best time" of your life!

Warmest Regards,

Patricia Hancox LISW-CP

Patricia Hancox, LISW-CP
Women Veterans Program Manager

Dear Friends,
I love this quote by Margaret Mead: "There is no greater power in the world than the sense of a postmenopausal woman." Many of you have expressed a desire to learn more about the physical changes you may be experiencing in your forties and fifties. For those of you in younger age groups, please take note as aging happens to us all, but with knowledge and healthy lifestyle choices we can make this a time to enjoy your life like never before.

When women are officially diagnosed as being "post menopausal" there is often the elated thought that the discomfort of menopause is finally over. Unfortunately, this is not often the case. Hormone levels will continue to fluctuate and different problems triggered by the lack of estrogen can start to occur.

Hot flashes are mostly caused by the hormonal changes of menopause, but can also be affected by lifestyle and medications. A diminished level of estrogen has a direct effect on the hypothalamus (the part of the brain responsible for controlling your appetite, sleep cycles, sex hormones, and body temperature). Somehow the drop in estrogen confuses the hypothalamus, which is sometimes referred to as the body's "thermostat," and makes it read "too hot." Your heart pumps faster, the blood vessels in your skin dilate to circulate more blood to radiate off the heat, and your sweat glands release sweat to cool you off even more. Eighty-five percent of the women in the United States experience hot flashes of some kind as they approach menopause and

Breast Cancer Awareness All Year

By Kevin S. Abel, Public Affairs Specialist

Veterans Affairs facilities around the country marked Breast Cancer Awareness Month with everything from Twitter parties and Race for the Cure teams to lectures on the emotional aspects of breast cancer, extended hours for mammograms and a few people who wore pink showing their support.

With breast cancer being the second most common cause of cancer deaths in women, breast cancer awareness should be on everyone's mind every month of the year.

According to www.breast-cancer.org, approximately one in eight women in the United States will develop invasive breast cancer over the course of her lifetime. In 2007, over 202,000 women were diagnosed with breast cancer and 2010 was expected to bring 30,000 more cases to the front lines, a 12% increase in just three years.

Mammograms and self-exams can detect breast cancer early, and early detection makes a big difference in a woman's chance of survival. National guidelines encourage all women between ages 50 and 75 to get



Charleston VA Medical Center staff show their support for Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

mammograms every two years. Women should talk with their provider about the risks and benefits of having mammograms and other methods of detection to make a decision based on their individual risk factors.

"Every woman Veteran has the ability to get a comprehensive physical exam head-to-toe, one stop shopping for pap smear and mammograms in the VA system," said Ann Hanlon, MD, Director Women's Health.

She added, "Every woman Veteran has the ability to use a female provider if they choose too."

Although a lot has been learned over the past 30 years, we still do not understand what causes breast cancer to develop at a certain time in a certain person. It's likely a combination of risk factors, many of which are still unknown, that make cells in the breast become cancerous. But why a certain combination of factors might cause cancer in one person, but not in another is still unclear.

There are steps that can be taken to lower risk, but no one has full control over whether they get breast cancer. Many risk factors are still unknown and some such as getting older or having a family history of breast cancer are simply out of control.

However, leading a healthy lifestyle can help lower the risk of breast cancer. Knowing what factors may increase your risk can help you work with your health care provider to address any concerns and

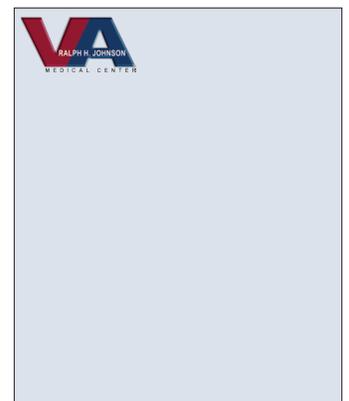
develop a breast health plan that is right for you.

For those who have a smart phone or tablet, there is an app for that. Most popular mobile platforms offer applications that will walk you through your breast cancer pathology reports and other tests and information that you and your doctor will use to help decide which treatments are right for you. These applications should in no way be a substitute for your primary care provider.

For more on women Veterans health care go to www.womenshealth.va.gov or talk to your Primary Care Provider.



Hinesville Primary Care Clinic staff show their support during Breast Cancer Awareness Month Celebration.



Female Veterans at Higher Risk for Suicide

By Laura Lythgoe, Public Affairs Specialist

Even though men die from suicide almost four times as often, suicide attempts are almost tripled for women. Suicide is the eleventh leading cause of death in the United States and kills more people each year than homicide or AIDS. Women in their 40s and 50s are taking their own lives more often than other same gender related age groups, but with more women joining the Armed Forces, death by suicide for women is expected to increase.

More and more women are returning from combat positions carrying burdens of their experience while trying to live normal lives again. Veteran-specific risk factors for suicide include: frequency and length of deployments and the location (hostile environments), exposure to extreme stress, physical or sexual assault while in the service (higher for women, but can happen to men as well) and service related injuries. Add these factors to general risk factors such as alcohol or substance abuse, recent losses - whether physical, financial or personal - feelings of hopelessness, and varying degrees of



depression. All of these factors may lead to more suicides or attempts amongst younger female Veterans in the future.

Acute warning signs and symptoms are: threatening to hurt or kill self, looking for

ways to kill self, seeking access to pills, weapons, or other means and talking or writing about death, dying or suicide. Other signs of concern include: rage and anger, acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, feeling trapped, anxiety or agitation, dramatic mood swings, feeling there's no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life, difficulty sleeping and giving away possessions.

Dr. Mark De Santis, Suicide Prevention Coordinator at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center said life stressors like marriage problems, job loss or relationship trouble can also be triggers.

“Once you begin to recognize some of these risk factors, it is critically important to ask if the person is thinking of suicide,” said De Santis. “Once you believe that they may need help, assure them that treatment is available.”

If you or someone you know is considering suicide call the **National Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), 24 hours a day/7 days a week.**

Getting Back into Shape after the Holidays

By Laura Lythgoe, Public Affairs Specialist

The holidays are over and you probably didn't watch your eating habits as closely as the rest of the year, and who can blame you? Thanksgiving means turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, pecan, pumpkin, or cherry pie (or all three!). The Christmas season welcomes sugar cookies, various items dipped in chocolate, fudge, peanut brittle, plus the main course! The holidays can certainly add a couple of unwanted pounds that were

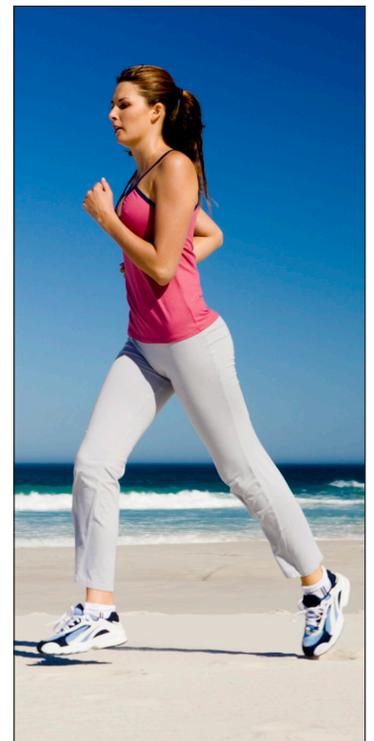
very easy to add on, but can be difficult to take off.



But where there is a will, there is always a way. Charleston VA Medical Center's MOVE! Coordinator, Rebecca Luhrs has some tips to get back on track and ready for beach weather in the Spring. She recommends finding an activity you like and doing it consistently.

“Everything counts - gardening, mall walking or shopping, household chores, cleaning your car, walking or playing with the dog, the important part is MOVE!” said Luhrs.

Luhrs also said walking is a great exercise, because you only need comfortable shoes. It can be done indoors or outdoors. Lastly, she recommends having a fitness partner. Having someone to workout with will not only help pass the time, but offer some friendly support that just may be your recipe for success.



Important VA Phone Numbers

Charleston VA Medical Center: 843-577-5011 or toll free 1-888-878-6884

Telephone Advice Line: 843-789-6400 or toll free at 1-888-878-6884

Veterans who need medical advice from their Primary Care provider or have questions about their medications can call the TAP line Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Scheduling an Appointment: 843-789-6500 or toll free at 1-888-878-6884

Veterans who need to schedule, cancel or reschedule an appointment for all Primary Care Clinics including Myrtle Beach, Savannah, Beaufort, Trident and Goose Creek can call Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Automated Prescription Refill Line: 843-577-5011 extension 5220 or toll free at 1-888-878-6884 extension 5220

Veterans who need to request a refill of a prescription or check the status of refills can call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Have your social security number and prescription numbers ready when calling.

VA Benefits (other than health care): 1-800-827-1000

Veterans who need information on VA benefits including VA pension and compensation, home loans and education can call the VA Regional Office.

Billing Questions: 1-866-258-2772

Veterans who have questions about a bill received from the Charleston VA Medical Center can call the VA Revenue Center.

Suicide Prevention: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) Press 1 for Veterans

Veterans can call the VA Suicide Prevention Lifeline to talk to trained professionals 24 hours a day, seven days a week or visit our website www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

My HealthVet: www.myhealth.va.gov

My HealthVet empowers you to manage your health. It offers anywhere, anytime Internet access to Veteran health care information and services. Log on and sign up today!

For more information on VA related topics visit www.charleston.va.gov.



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Concerning
Women