

TAKE THIS ISSUE HOME!

VA

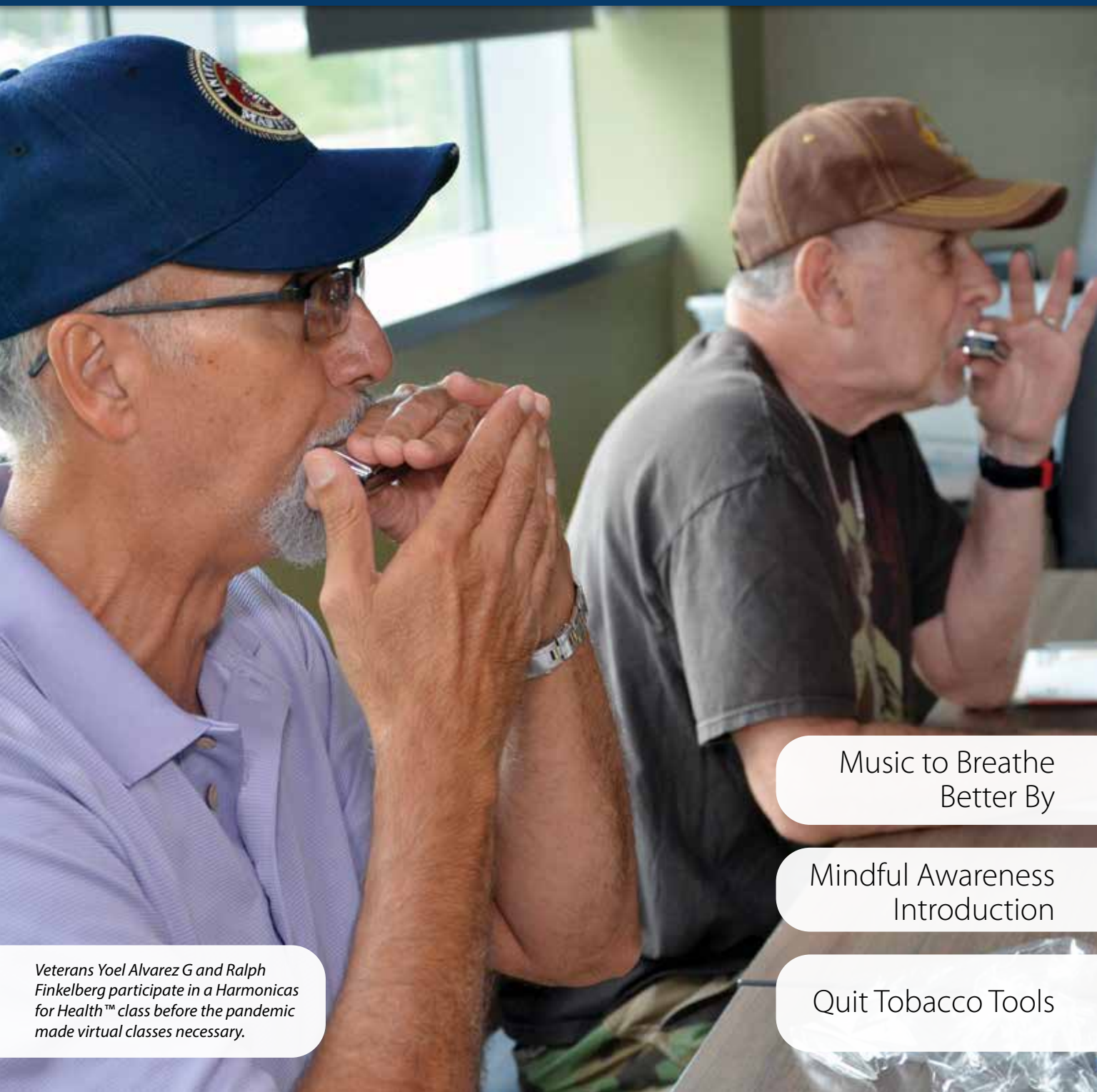


U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
VA Sunshine Healthcare Network (VISN 8)

# VETERANS Health MATTERS

WINTER 2020

Award Winning Wellness Magazine for **VISN 8** Veterans  
in Florida, South Georgia, Puerto Rico & the U.S. Virgin Islands



Music to Breathe  
Better By

Mindful Awareness  
Introduction

Quit Tobacco Tools

Veterans Yoel Alvarez G and Ralph Finkelberg participate in a *Harmonicas for Health™* class before the pandemic made virtual classes necessary.

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**Veterans Health Matters** is a quarterly health and wellness magazine for Veterans produced by the VISN 8 Office of Communication. VISN 8 is the country's largest network of VA hospitals and clinics serving Veterans in Florida, South Georgia, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. Your feedback is welcome. If you'd like to comment on the content, please e-mail or write to:

Managing Editor *Veterans Health Matters*  
VISN 8 Office of Communication  
140 Fountain Parkway, Suite 600  
St. Petersburg, Florida 33716

**e-mail: [visn8communicationoffice@va.gov](mailto:visn8communicationoffice@va.gov)**  
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# To Our Readers



Mindful awareness is at the heart of VA's Whole Health program. It means focusing on what is going on in the present moment instead of going through the day on autopilot. Mindful awareness can do a lot to help us live healthier, fuller lives. Learn more on page 3, including a mindful breathing exercise. Plus, read below about VA's Mindfulness Coach App.

Doing breathing exercises is a key part of managing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Harmonicas for Health™ is an innovative program which combines breathing exercises with the joy of making music. Read how Veterans are breathing their way to better health by playing the harmonica on pages 4 to 5.

Is this the year you plan to quit tobacco for good? Everyone's quit journey is unique. That's why VA offers a wide variety of quit resources to fit your personal needs and preferences. Check out page 6 for more details.

Finally, please enjoy our healthy comfort food recipe on page 7, along with this issue's brain puzzle.

Be safe and stay well!

**Miguel H. LaPuz, M.D., MBA**  
**Network Director, VISN 8**

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## Check Out VA's Mindfulness Coach App



Mindfulness means noticing and paying attention to what is going on in the present moment, without passing judgment on it. Studies show that mindfulness can be effective for reducing stress, improving emotional balance, increasing self-awareness, helping with anxiety and depression, and coping better with chronic pain.

VA's Mindfulness Coach app was developed to help Veterans, Service members, and others learn how to practice mindfulness. The app provides a gradual, self-guided training program. It is designed to help you adopt a simple mindfulness practice. The app also offers a library of information about mindfulness, 12 audio-guided exercises, and a catalog of additional exercises you can download for free. Other features include goal setting and tracking tools, a mindfulness mastery assessment to track your progress, reminders, and access to other support and crisis resources.

Learn more at **[www.mobile.va.gov/app/mindfulness-coach](http://www.mobile.va.gov/app/mindfulness-coach)**.

# Mindful Awareness:

## An Introduction

Mindful awareness is paying attention in a specific way: on purpose, focusing on the present moment, and without judging it. Did you ever drive or walk somewhere and later not remember seeing anything along the way? It is easy to go through your day on autopilot. Are you at times so caught up in the past or future that you are not fully experiencing the present? If so, you are like most people. But it is possible to learn a different way to relate to the world, with greater awareness. Mindful awareness can do a lot to help us live healthier, fuller lives.



### How can you better understand what mindful awareness is?

Try this exercise to get a better sense of mindful awareness: Sit comfortably with your feet planted on the floor. Sit as tall as possible. Now, for the next two minutes, focus all your awareness on your breathing. Do not change how you breathe. Just pay attention to how it feels to breathe in and breathe out. Also notice the pauses between each of your breaths.

Consider taking two more minutes to repeat this exercise. This time, when your thoughts wander away from your breath (and they will), gently return your attention to your breathing. Or, if a judgment arises, simply notice it. Then bring your attention back to your breathing. When your mind wanders, be gentle with yourself. Do not be concerned if you had trouble completing the exercise without distractions or judgments. Over time and with practice, mindful awareness can become easier and more natural.

### How can I learn to be more mindful?

You can practice mindful awareness on your own as you go about your day, with the help of some simple breathing exercises. Or, you can take a class, so a teacher is available to answer questions that come up as you practice. In a class, you also hear what works for fellow Veterans, too.

Contact your PACT team to learn more about Whole Health and class options available for mindful awareness. And visit **[www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/circle-of-health/mindful-awareness.asp](http://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/circle-of-health/mindful-awareness.asp)** where you can access a wide variety of mindful awareness resources and techniques.



### Why is mindful awareness important?

Mindful awareness is at the heart of VA's Whole Health program. It is right in the center of the Circle of Health (see above). Mindful awareness helps you to be aware of thoughts and feelings. Yet you don't focus on them. Instead, mindful awareness helps you focus on the present and the things that are most important to you.



# Music to Breathe Better By



*A group of Veterans isn't letting something like a pandemic stop their musical aspirations – or the improvement in their breathing it brings.*

By Ed Drohan,  
Public Affairs Specialist, James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital

Harmonicas for Health™ is a program created by the COPD Foundation and the Academy of Country Music for individuals with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. COPD is a catch-all term that includes people diagnosed with illnesses like emphysema, asthma, and chronic bronchitis.



*Marine Corps Veteran Yoel Alvarez G. tries out his new harmonica before his first Harmonicas for Health™ class. The class has since gone virtual due to the coronavirus pandemic.*



## How It Helps

According to former JAHVH Health Promotion-Disease Prevention Coordinator Dave Folds, the type of breathing used to play the harmonica is like the breathing exercise used in therapy for COPD. Folds started the program at the hospital last year. "Harmonicas for Health™ is using a musical instrument to use the same inhale-

exhale exercises used by pulmonary rehabilitation to strengthen diaphragm muscles," Folds explained. "Basically, the breathing exercises are pursed lips style breathing, like breathing in and out of a straw. Breathing through a straw would be the same way you would blow in and out of a harmonica."



## One Veteran's Experience



*Army Veteran Don Gilbreath plays during his Harmonicas for Health™ class. The classes are now being conducted virtually to ensure the safety of the participants.*

### Class Goes Virtual

In response to the current COVID-19 pandemic, the class was transitioned to a virtual format in March. Dustin Lawhorne, who took over the classes when Folds retired recently, said the classes at both the Primary Care Annex and the New Port Richey Outpatient Clinic are now being held through VA Video Connect every week. He said it was important for classes to continue virtually rather than in-person. COVID-19 can be especially devastating to people with existing breathing problems.

Veterans who enroll in the class are given their own harmonica, along with a music book and literature on COPD. Using the harmonica makes it more fun and more likely that participants will continue with the exercises when the class ends.

"By making music, it's much more enjoyable than sitting at home for half an hour each day breathing in and out of a straw," Folds said. "Most people in this class won't do that, and they say so. But they will sit at home and practice their harmonica, some of them for hours."

Army Veteran Don Gilbreath, who was participating in the classes before they went virtual, said Harmonicas for Health™ made a notable difference in his fight against COPD. "I do feel a difference. I have more endurance," Gilbreath said. "With the harmonica, you're actually achieving something and hopefully getting pleasant sounds out of it. You're getting the reward for the effort you put in, and that's the thing I like about it."

Lawhorne said the hope is to eventually get back to in-person classes. That's because one of the key benefits is the camaraderie built up among participants. But there are no plans to resume in-person classes right now.

"Due to a majority of patients enrolled in the class having COPD and other breathing issues, they're in the at-risk category when it comes to COVID-19," Lawhorne said. "The Veterans' safety is our number one priority. Veterans actively enrolled in our two Harmonicas for Health™ classes have been thankful we are still doing the classes virtually."

While JAHVH is the only hospital currently offering Harmonicas for Health™, facilities that would like to offer the classes can contact Lawhorne at 813-998-8000, extension 2021, or visit **[www.copdfoundation.org/HarmonicasforHealth](http://www.copdfoundation.org/HarmonicasforHealth)**.



### **Watch the Video!**

Check out the video, "Mindful Awareness Matters" at **[www.visn8.va.gov/visn8/news/publications.asp](http://www.visn8.va.gov/visn8/news/publications.asp)**.

# Quit Tobacco Tools

*Are you one of the seven out of 10 Veterans who smoke and would like to quit?*

*Is this the year you quit tobacco for good?*

Quitting tobacco is hard. That's why it often takes several attempts to quit for good. But every Veteran's quit journey is unique. VA is here to help by offering many kinds of resources to fit your specific needs and your preferences.

## **VA's approach to quitting tobacco focuses on the proven combination of medications and counseling.**

- **Medications** - Examples include FDA-approved nicotine replacement therapy and varenicline. They help manage nicotine withdrawal and cope with tobacco cravings.
- **Counseling** – This is available in person, over the phone, and through other online video connections. You will learn ways to get tobacco out of your life, coping with triggers, and how to create a tobacco-free lifestyle.



## **RESOURCES for Quitting**

- **Quit VET Quitline:** Call 1-855-QUIT-VET (1-855-784-8838) between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. ET, Monday - Friday. Speak with a Quit VET counselor to get personalized counseling, get help to make a quit plan, and learn ways to prevent relapse. Available in English and Spanish.
- **SmokefreeVET Text Messages:** Receive text messages to stay motivated and provide tips to help you quit tobacco and stay quit. Text VET to 47848 or visit **veterans.smokefree.gov**. Available in English and Spanish.
- **VA Tobacco and Health Website ([www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco)):** Learn more about tobacco, how it affects your health, and ways to quit.
- **Stay Quit Coach App ([www.mobile.va.gov](http://www.mobile.va.gov)):** Download this app for interactive tools to help cope with urges to smoke and motivational messages to help you stay smoke-free.
- **Smokefree.gov Website:** Variety of tools and supports to help you quit, including how to build your personalized quit plan, how to use nicotine replacement therapy, and tips on managing tobacco triggers and cravings.
- **SmokefreeVET Facebook ([www.facebook.com/smokefreevet](http://www.facebook.com/smokefreevet)):** Join this support community for Veterans to become and stay tobacco-free.



**Talk to your VA health care provider to help you decide which quit tobacco options and resources are best for you.**

# Word Scramble

Can you unscramble these words that appear in this issue of *Veterans Health Matters*?

FLUDIMN RESSWANE A \_\_\_\_\_

SENPTER \_\_\_\_\_

PLATOTUOI \_\_\_\_\_

HBARET \_\_\_\_\_

CAANHROMI \_\_\_\_\_

RMGIDAPAH SESULMC \_\_\_\_\_

CTBOOCA GSERTIGR \_\_\_\_\_

EQILNUTI \_\_\_\_\_

OGCNUIESLN \_\_\_\_\_

## Chicken Tortilla Soup

### Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 chopped yellow onion
- 4 minced cloves of garlic
- 1 diced, seeded jalapeño pepper
- 1 teaspoon each of ground cumin and chili powder
- 1 14-ounce can low-sodium diced tomatoes
- 4 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 1 14-ounce can reduced-sodium black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 cup frozen corn
- 2 medium boneless, skinless chicken breasts

### Baked Tortilla Strips

- 8 small corn tortillas, cut into ¼-inch strips
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon salt



### Directions

1. Line a baking sheet with foil and loosely scatter tortilla strips evenly. Add 2 tablespoons of oil and the salt and toss to coat evenly. Bake about 15 minutes in a 375-degree oven until crisp and golden brown.
2. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add onion, garlic, and jalapeño. Cook 5 minutes.
3. Add remaining ingredients and simmer 20 minutes, or until chicken is fully cooked.
4. Remove chicken and shred using two forks. Add back to the pot and simmer for 5 minutes.
5. Serve and top each bowl with the baked tortilla strips.

**Nutritional information:** (8 servings). Per serving: 226 calories, 7 g total fat, 1 g saturated fat, 28 g carbohydrates, 5 g dietary fiber, 15 g protein, and 693 mg sodium.

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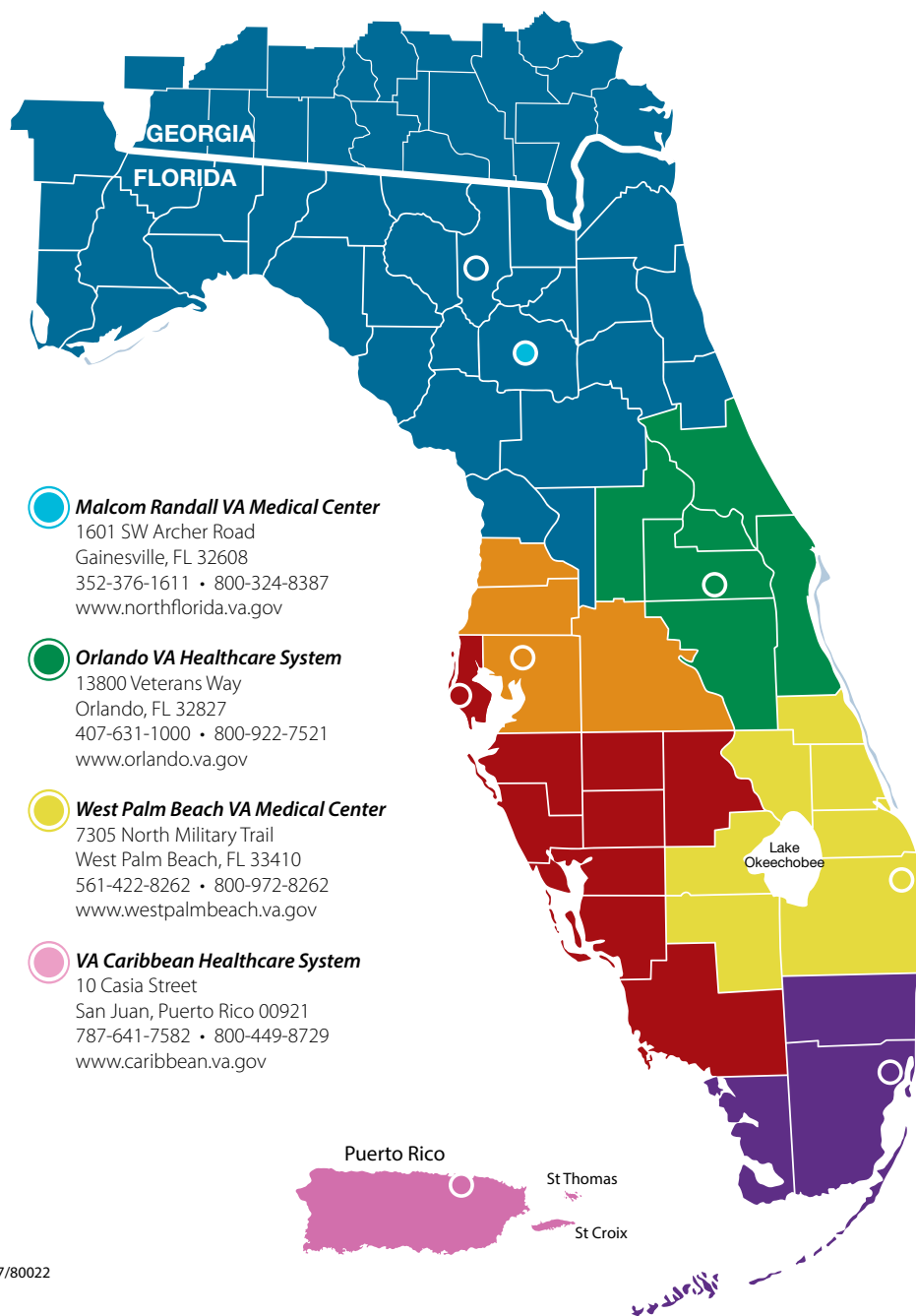
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