

WINTER
2017

VETERANS Health MATTERS

VA



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

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



INSIDE:
Coping with Depression

Pictured: West Palm Beach VA Medical Center offers classes to help Veterans combat stress and lead healthier lives. Here, tai chi instructor and blind rehabilitation outpatient specialist Lauren O'Farrell (front, left) guides a group of Veterans through a tai chi and meditation class which improves strength, flexibility, and balance. *Photo by Joanne Deithorn*

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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:

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To Our Readers



Thanks to more effective treatments and medicines, our Veterans who have HIV/AIDS are now living much longer with a better quality of life. Along with VA medical care, there's a lot you can do to stay strong and healthy to fight HIV/AIDS. Learn more on page 3.

Depression can also be a serious health condition for our Veterans. Read on pages 4 and 5 about many effective ways to treat and manage this mood disorder.

Everyone loves an inspiring story. Check out page 6 for one woman's journey of how she came to embrace a healthier lifestyle. One way to do this is to enjoy healthier versions of beverages. See page 7 for a delicious holiday beverage recipe and a fun and festive activity created by Todd Soper, our talented illustrator at the Tampa VA hospital.

We celebrate another inspiring Veteran who appeared on the cover of this magazine's Summer 2017 issue. Read more about him in 'Signing Party' on page 6.

Be well!

Miguel LaPuz, M.D., MPA
Network Director, VISN 8

Vitamin D for bones and...

Vitamin D is essential to keep your bones strong and healthy. It helps:

- Absorb calcium, also needed for healthy bones
- Maintain blood calcium and phosphate levels to keep bones hard and strong
- Grow new bone tissue
- Prevent osteoporosis in adults
- Prevent rickets in children

Besides keeping your bones healthy, vitamin D helps grow cells, maintain muscles and nerves, reduce inflammation, and promote better immunity to help your body fight infections and some diseases.

How to get vitamin D?

- Food – Salmon, tuna, milk, some fruit juices, and breakfast cereals
- Dietary supplements
- Sunshine – Vitamin D is made in our body when the sun's ultraviolet light touches our skin. However, be careful to protect yourself. Too much sun is a major risk for skin cancer.



For more information, visit www.ods.od.nih.gov and enter the search term "vitamin D."

Living with HIV/AIDS

Veterans with HIV/AIDS now live much longer and have a much better quality of life, thanks to more effective treatments and medicines. Along with the care provided by your VA medical team to fight HIV/AIDS, there's a lot you can do to stay strong and healthy, every day.



Eat a nutritious diet

Get the right nutrients and the right amount of food to keep your body and immune system strong to help reduce symptoms of HIV/AIDS. This includes fighting side effects of medication, like loss of appetite and nausea.



Get regular exercise

Aim for at least 150 minutes per week to work your heart and lungs, build and maintain strong muscles and bones, and increase energy and appetite. Check with your health care provider before starting to exercise.



Mind your mental health

You may have emotions such as anger, sadness, and fear. Also, it is possible to have depression or anxiety. Talk with your VA health care provider to get the mental health care and support you need.



Consider alternative therapies

Along with your medical care and anti-HIV drugs, alternative therapies may strengthen your immune system, reduce symptoms, and reduce medication side effects. Examples include tai chi, massage, and herbal medicine.



Talk about sex

Be honest about your sexual practices to get the best possible health care. Tell current and past sexual partner(s) you have HIV/AIDS so they can get tested. Learn about ways to help you have safer sex to protect yourself and your partner(s).



Avoid (or strictly limit) alcohol and recreational drugs

These substances weaken your immune system. Plus, you may have more side effects from HIV/AIDS medicine. Talk to your VA provider about getting help to quit.



Quit tobacco

If you use tobacco, including smokeless, look for ways to quit. When you have HIV/AIDS, it does more harm than to those who don't have HIV/AIDS. Quitting tobacco is a powerful way to improve your health. Contact your VA health care team or visit www.smokefree.gov/veterans to get started.



Talk about your military experiences

Consider joining a support group, or ask your VA health care team for a possible referral to a mental health professional.

To receive confidential support contact:



To learn more about living healthy with HIV/AIDS visit www.hiv.va.gov.

Coping with Depression

By Susan Wentzell with Dr. Bryan Ballot



Board-certified psychiatrist Dr. Bryan Ballot is the Mental Health Product Line Manager for the VA Sunshine Healthcare Network. He has over 25 years of VA experience and has

worked in inpatient and outpatient psychiatric services, substance abuse detoxification, and forensic rehabilitation.



It's normal to feel sad or depressed sometimes, such as when someone close to you dies. We may cry, have trouble sleeping, or lose our appetite. These are typical human reactions after a loss.

What's not normal is for people to feel this way over long periods of time, according to Bryan Ballot, M.D., a board-certified psychiatrist and Mental Health Product Line manager for the VA Sunshine Healthcare Network. He said a "major depressive disorder" may be present based on how long the depression lasts, in combination with other physical symptoms.

Depression is a mood disorder that affects how you feel, think, and manage daily activities. However, depression can affect more than your mood. "For example, you may feel depressed or irritable most of the day for at least two weeks. You sleep a lot or not enough. You're tired, lose weight or gain weight.

You may have thoughts of your own death and you lose interest in life in general," Dr. Ballot said. Plus, people can experience major depression anytime in their life, and it can happen more than once.

Sometimes depression comes with other serious conditions like cancer, heart disease, stroke, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It can also occur when abusing, or withdrawing from, drugs or alcohol.

Depression often causes poor sleep. However, getting to the core of the sleep problem can be challenging, according to Dr. Ballot. Older male Veterans often don't like to talk about their feelings, or only talk about their irritability rather than their depressed mood. "Often, it's their wives who say their husbands are grouchy, not able to sleep, and lack their usual 'get up and go,'" he said. "With these symptoms, there's often depression." All Veterans seen at VA facilities are screened yearly for depression.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression*

- Sad or anxious mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, guilt or worthlessness
- Loss of interest in activities
- Decreased energy or fatigue
- Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight changes
- Thoughts of death, suicide, or suicide attempts
- Restlessness or irritability
- Aches or pains, headaches, or digestive problems that do not go away with treatment

* Depression Basics, NIMH

Continued on page 5

Watch the Video!

More of a visual learner? Then you can watch a video of "Coping with Depression" at www.visn8.va.gov/VISN8/news/publications.asp.





Depression is a mood disorder that affects how you feel, think, and manage daily activities.

Treating Depression

For enrolled Veterans, the first step in treating depression is to contact your VA Primary Care Provider, Patient Aligned Care Team member, or mental health professional. After an evaluation and if diagnosed with depression, treatment begins with medication, psychotherapy, or a combination of both. "Patients who are treated with both antidepressant medication and cognitive behavior psychotherapy do much better than with either one alone," Dr. Ballot explained.



Psychotherapy helps by teaching a person new ways of thinking, behaving, and changing habits that may contribute to depression, according to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).

Antidepressants work well for about 60 percent of patients who are closely monitored during the first few weeks, said Dr. Ballot. "However, no medication is perfect and they all have potential side effects. They can cause nausea, which usually goes away after a few weeks of treatment. They can also take two to four weeks to work."



The most commonly used antidepressants can lead to sexual problems in some men and women. If the side effects don't go away, or remain troublesome, there are other medications that may help. The bottom line of whether to continue a medication or stop and try something else is a decision between the patient and provider.

Doing Battle with Depression

Gradually, you may start to feel better during your treatment. Do things you enjoy and go easy on yourself. Try to be active, and don't take on large projects. Postpone important decisions until you feel better and avoid using alcohol or drugs that aren't prescribed for you, advises the NIMH.

"I tell Veterans suffering from depression to resist the symptoms: get proper rest and eat at regular meal times—even when they're not hungry. Fight the tendency to want to be alone. Get out and be among people. Ask for help from family members, friends, and health care professionals," Dr. Ballot said. If a loved one is talking about suicide or death, always take them seriously, he advised. "If they refuse, get help for them anyway. Better to prevent a suicide than to regret not calling."

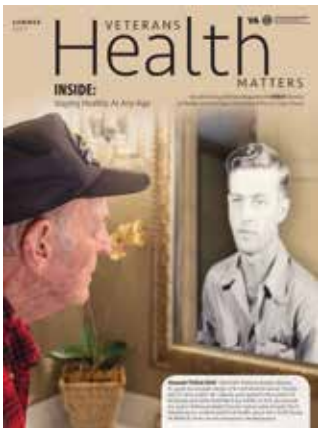
The Veterans Crisis Line is a confidential, toll-free hotline, online chat, or text. Veterans and their loved ones can call 1-800-273-8255 or visit www.veteranscrisisline.net to learn more.



Signing Party



VA employees and friends line up during a "Signing Party" for World War II Veteran Buddy Callaway July 17 at the Community Living Center of the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center in St. Petersburg, Fla. Mr. Callaway appeared on the cover of this magazine's Summer 2017 issue. In the photo, Mr. Callaway gazes at a younger version of himself as an 18-year-old soldier. This highly decorated 91-year-old participated in the Invasion of Normandy and other key WWII battles. In 2016, he received the Legion of Honour Medal, France's highest order of merit.



A Fraction of the Person She Was, and Thankful For It

By Ed Drohan

Army Veteran Susan Mahon isn't the woman she was just a few years ago, and for that she is very thankful.

Mahon, with the help of programs offered through the James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital, lost 135 pounds. She had gained this excess weight while bedridden with a chronic disease for more than a year. When her health improved enough, she joined several classes at the hospital, including VA's *MOVE!* program. This is the largest and most comprehensive weight management program associated with a medical care system in the U.S.

"For a year and a half, I wasn't able to get out of the house. I got so depressed from the illness and the weight gain that I was at a loss," Mahon said. "So I joined these classes – *MOVE!*, *THRIVE*, one for pain management, and one for anxiety and stress. Just through the classes and the instructors, I started seeing a change in my attitude."

Pictured: Susan Mahon



Most programs described are available at VA facilities in the VA Sunshine Healthcare Network. JAHVH Health Promotions and Disease Prevention Coordinator Dave Folds, says these programs help Veterans lose excess weight and make lifestyle changes to live overall healthier lives.

The eight-week, JAHVH My Health Works program also helped Mahon improve her life so much that she wants to be a volunteer with the program.

"I strongly recommend the *MOVE!* program. Take as many classes as you can because you get so much support from the instructors and the VA," Mahon said. "That's why now I help other Vets because their support saved me."

Veterans enrolled in VA care in Florida, South Georgia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands interested in *MOVE!* and other classes, should check with their Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT). To learn more about *MOVE!*, visit www.move.va.gov.

Fun Holiday Activity

Can you find 8 differences?



Illustration by Todd Soper,
James A. Haley Veterans Hospital



FEATURED Recipe!

Pomegranate Festive Fizz



Ingredients

- 2 cups pomegranate juice cocktail (contains sugar)
- 4 cups plain sparkling water
(seltzer or sodium-free club soda)
- ½ cup pomegranate seeds
- 3 limes (1 for garnish)

Directions

1. In a large pitcher, mix pomegranate juice cocktail and seeds, sparkling water, juice of 2 limes and 8 ice cubes.
2. Pour into glasses and garnish with a lime wedge and mint leaves, if desired.

Options: To further reduce sugar content, use 100% pomegranate juice.

Nutritional Information: Serves 8. Per serving: 49 calories, 0 g total fat, 12 g carbohydrates, 0 g dietary fiber, 0 g protein, and 4 mg sodium.

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1. Complete this form with the Veteran's full name and current mailing address.
2. Cut out the form and insert in a stamped envelope.
3. Mail to:
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c/o VISN 8 – VHM
30445 Northwestern Hwy., Ste. 350
Farmington Hills, MI 48334

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The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans and their loved ones with qualified, caring VA responders through a confidential, toll-free, 24/7 hotline. Call 1-800-273-8255 or visit www.veteranscrisisline.net.

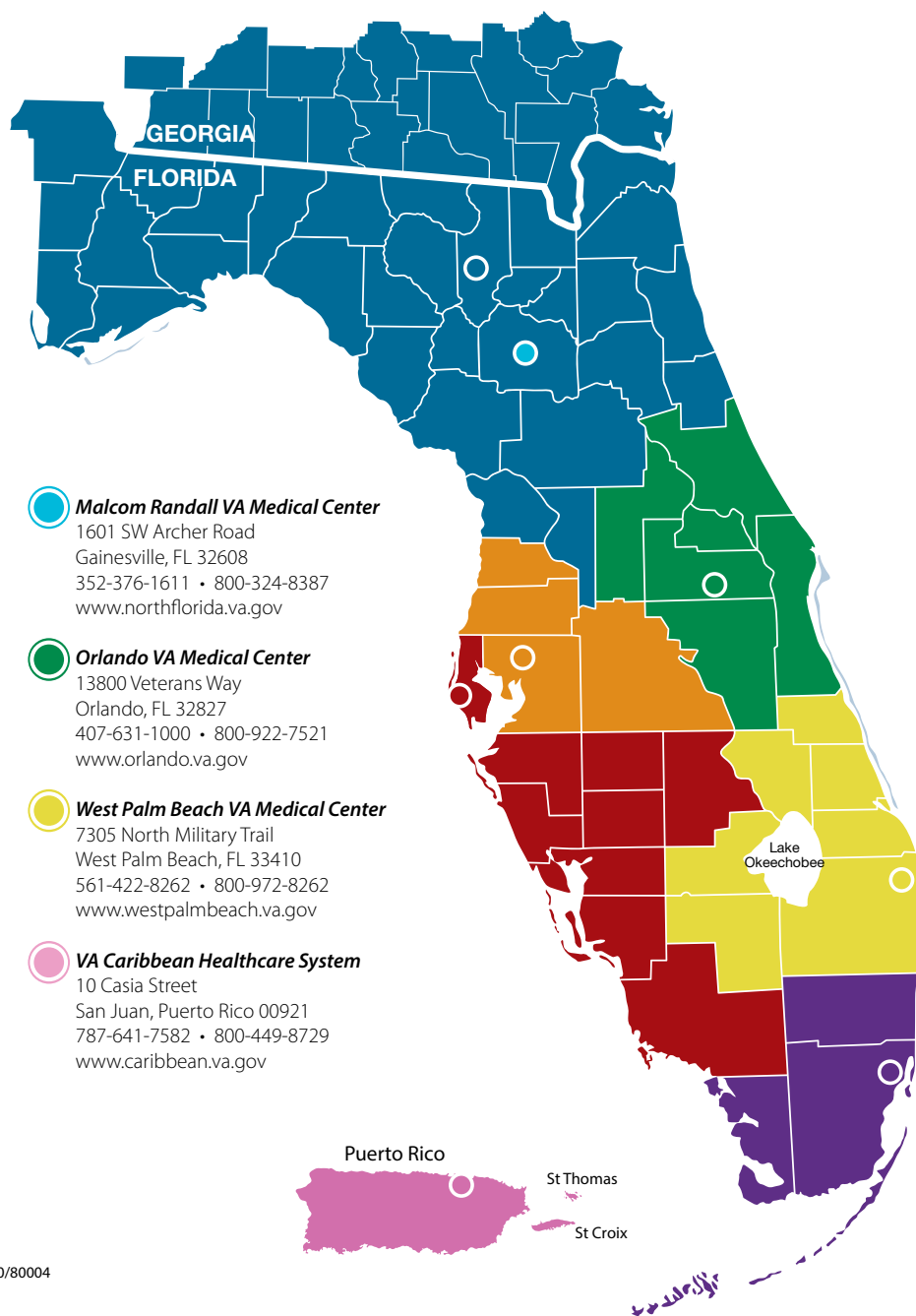
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Find a VA hospital or clinic near you:
www.va.gov/health/FindCare.asp



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