

SUMMER • 2008

Veterans'

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

Health

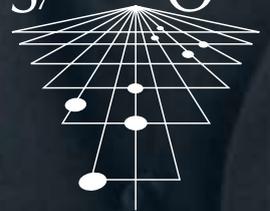
Combat stress
and suicide:
What you need
to know

How exercise
can help control
diabetes

Kick your
smoking habit
for good

Dick Wardlow, graduate
of VA's smoking
cessation program

VA Healthcare
System of Ohio



To our readers

The goal of *Veterans' Health* is to keep you healthy by featuring helpful information on many topics. I hope you can benefit from this issue's important subjects.



Suicidal thoughts are a serious issue that many veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom are facing. It's time to get help. Learn about the warning signs and how you can help a loved one who may be suffering.

You can also learn about VA's MOVE! program and how it's helping many veterans maintain a healthy weight, especially those who have diabetes. Exercise can benefit people who have diabetes because it helps insulin work better to lower blood glucose levels.

Finally, read about our smoking cessation program and how it helped veteran Dick Wardlow quit. Many veterans are quitting successfully through the program, and we hope other smokers decide that this is the year they'll quit, too.

Have a happy and safe summer!

Jack W. Hetrick

—Jack Hetrick, Network Director

Prevent tick bites

The majority of Lyme disease cases occur in the summer months, when people spend more time outdoors and are exposed to ticks. Lyme disease causes muscle aches, headache, fever, fatigue and swollen lymph nodes and joints.

A key symptom is a circular red patch that appears at the bite site three to 30 days later. Left untreated, Lyme disease can spread to the heart and nervous system, so it's important to see your doctor right away. Remove the entire tick carefully with tweezers and save it for identification by the local health department.

To stay safe this summer:

- Avoid wooded, grassy areas, especially from May to July.
- Wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts and shoes that cover your whole foot. Add a hat for extra



protection.

- Tuck pant legs into socks or shoes, and tuck shirts into pants.
- Spray insect repellent containing DEET on your clothes.
- Do a careful body check for ticks after outdoor activities, and wash the clothing you wore at a high temperature.
- Regularly check your pets for ticks after they've been outdoors. Ask your veterinarian about Lyme disease prevention.



About our mailing list

We make every effort to ensure our mailing lists are accurate. If you have questions or would like to be added to or deleted from the list, let us know. Please include your entire address. To make a change, you *must* mail the mailing panel to:

Veterans' Health

VA Healthcare System of Ohio Network Office

11500 Northlake Drive, Suite 200

Cincinnati, OH 45249

Veterans' Health is online at www.visn10.va.gov. Visit this site to view back issues or subscribe.

Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 21 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

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SOS: Combat stress and suicide

What you need to know

Returning from combat to the normal routines of everyday life can be a complicated transition. Some veterans experience combat stress—strong emotions of anger, sadness, guilt, fear or numbness. Many vets are unable to stop thinking about the difficult things they may have experienced while deployed.

These reactions are normal and should fade after a few days or weeks. But what happens when they don't? In some veterans, combat stress deepens and becomes consuming. Chronic combat stress can even trigger suicidal thoughts.

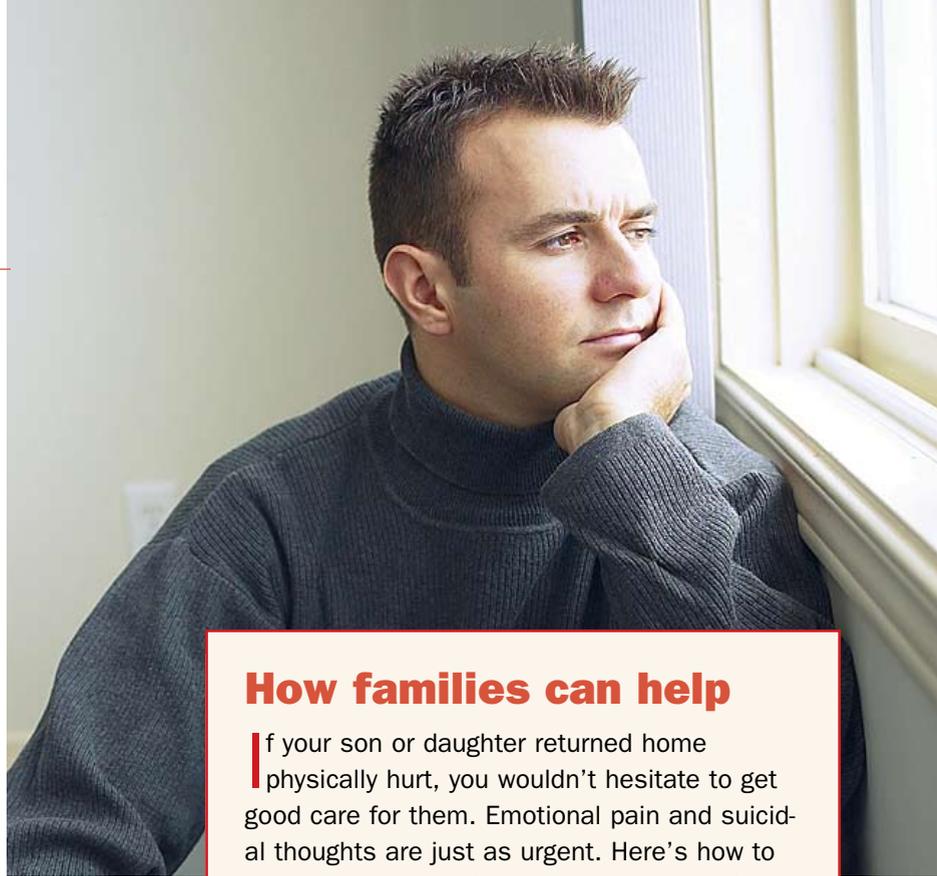
Getting help

If thoughts of suicide are overwhelming you, remember:

You aren't alone. You can find support from those who have also been there and those who know how to help deal with the emotional aftermath. Chronic symptoms of combat stress and suicidal thoughts are your body's way of telling you something is wrong.

You can reach out. Help can only start if you reach out. Talk to a counselor, your doctor, friends, family or your clergy member, and ask them to help you navigate the next steps. You should reach out immediately, especially if you're experiencing thoughts of suicide.

Treatment can save your life. Whether it's counseling, medication or a little of both, treatment can give you skills to cope, solve problems



How families can help

If your son or daughter returned home physically hurt, you wouldn't hesitate to get good care for them. Emotional pain and suicidal thoughts are just as urgent. Here's how to get your vet on track toward a new outlook.

• Know the warning signs:

- heavy drinking or drug use
- outbursts of anger or violence
- dangerous risk-taking
- isolation
- depression
- talking (even joking) about suicide
- preoccupation with death
- disinterest in his or her appearance

• **Be a good listener.** Make it clear that you will listen, love, support and not judge.

• **Get your vet out of danger.** Remove drugs, weapons and alcohol from the environment.

• **Seek help.** Talk to your doctor, clergy member or a counselor for advice.

Don't hesitate

Not sure where to turn? Call VA's toll-free suicide hotline number: **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**.

and regain your confidence. Treatment can change your thoughts and feelings, allowing you to adapt and return to enjoying and living life. It's a smart strategy that has worked for many other veterans like you. **VH**

Diabetes and exercise



What's your diabetes risk?

You're more at risk for type 2 diabetes if you:

- are older than 45 years old
- are overweight or obese
- are physically inactive
- have a history of high blood pressure or high cholesterol levels
- have given birth to a baby over 9 pounds or have had gestational diabetes
- are from a family with a history of diabetes
- are of Hispanic American, African American, Native American, Asian American or Pacific Islander descent

People who have diabetes are able to manage their condition through good self-care. In addition to eating well and taking your medication as instructed by your doctor, make sure your regimen includes exercise. Regular exercise—taking a brisk, 30-minute walk several times a week, for example—may be as effective as diet and medication in controlling blood sugar levels.

Exercise benefits

If you have diabetes, exercise can:

- help you attain and maintain a healthy weight
- make it easier to control your blood sugar levels
- keep your heart and lungs healthy
- lower your blood pressure
- boost your energy

Get into a routine

Of the 6 million veterans enrolled in the VA healthcare system, about 44 percent of them are overweight, and an additional 24 percent are obese. Here are some answers to questions you may have as you consider starting or maximizing your exercise routine.

Q What kind of exercises should I consider?

A: Aerobic exercise gives the broadest benefits. Try walking, biking, swimming, jogging, even dancing!

Q Can I do other exercises in addition to aerobic activities?

A: Stretching is great after your muscles are warmed up for five minutes. Do be careful, however, about lifting weights. Weight lifting

isn't advisable if you have eye disease due to your diabetes or high blood pressure.

Q How often should I exercise?

A: If you're new to exercise, start with five to 10 minutes a day, and then add five minutes more until you reach a goal of 30 minutes almost every day. Try three daily sessions of 10 minutes.

Q What special precautions should I take when I exercise?

A: Take these safety measures:

- Check your blood sugar levels before you begin. If it's been more than an hour since you ate, or if your blood sugar is less than 100 mg/dl, have a snack before you exercise.
- Don't exercise if your blood sugar is greater than 250 mg/dl, you have ketones in your urine or your blood sugar is less than 100 mg/dl and you can't get a pre-exercise snack.
- Carry glucose tablets or a carbohydrate snack with you in case your blood sugar drops too low.
- Drink water before, during and after exercise.
- Wear visible identification noting you have diabetes.

Q Should I check with my doctor before I start an exercise program?

A: Absolutely! He or she will make sure you're building a program that's safe for you.

Q Can the VA healthcare system offer advice?

A: The VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention has designed a national program to help veterans lose weight, keep it off and improve their health. MOVE! provides guidance on nutrition and physical activity and allows you to set the pace through individual goal setting and a stepped-level approach. Your MOVE! healthcare team at your local VA medical center can provide you with support and follow-up. Ask your primary care provider for a referral to the MOVE! Program. **VH**

5 Diabetes myths

1 MYTH: You can "catch" diabetes.

TRUTH: Diabetes is not contagious.

2 MYTH: Sugar causes diabetes.

TRUTH: Diabetes is caused by a combination of inherited factors and lifestyle choices. Being overweight, for instance, does increase your risk for developing type 2 diabetes.

3 MYTH: No more sweets!

TRUTH: As part of a carefully controlled self-management plan, people who have diabetes can eat desserts.

4 MYTH: People who have diabetes need to eat special diabetic foods.

TRUTH: What makes a healthy diet for people who have diabetes is the same healthy diet for everybody—low in fat, easy on the salt and sugar and filled with lots of whole grains, vegetables and fruit.

5 MYTH: Insulin causes weight gain, so you shouldn't take it.

TRUTH: The good insulin does exceed the risk of weight gain. Your healthcare team can help you maintain a healthy weight even if you have to take insulin.



Kicking the smoking habit

One veteran's story

After 54 years of smoking as much as two-and-a-half packs a day, Dick Wardlow (pictured on cover) was truly a nicotine addict. Even a heart attack and a procedure at a VA hospital to place two stents in his clogged arteries did little to deter his craving. That is, until he enrolled in a smoking cessation program run by VA Healthcare System of Ohio.

“When I had my stents placed, the VA told me about the smoking cessation class. I told them I’d probably never quit, but that I’d go ahead and see what it was about,” Wardlow says. That was three-and-a-half years ago. Today, at age 71, he’s a proud—and very grateful—ex-smoker. Indeed, he calls his decision to stop smoking the best thing that happened in his life.

Help for every veteran

Wardlow’s experience shows how effective a well-rounded smoking cessation program like VA’s can be. “We offer access to everything they need,” says Susan Myre, R.N., a certified tobacco treatment specialist with the Cincinnati VA Medical Center who’s been helping veterans quit for the past four-and-a-half years. “We have individualized and group sessions, as well as a quit line for those who are homebound or live so far out they can’t get to a VA facility. We also offer nicotine replacement patches and medicines to help them stop, and our trained counselors can

make referrals to other specialists if needed.”

What helped turn the tide for Wardlow—who had tried to quit a number of times over the years—were the weekly group sessions with other veterans facing the same challenge as him. “Being together each week and having the chance to talk about all the issues was the best therapy,” says Wardlow. Even though he was also given a nicotine replacement patch to wear, he says, “You have to really want to quit.”



A tough battle

Myre notes that 80 percent of tobacco users do, in fact, want to quit, and half of them make the effort during the year. Some are moved by the physical consequences of smoking—a heart attack, perhaps, or a spot on the lungs or difficulty breathing—while others heed the pleas of family members or their physicians to quit. Regardless of their motivation, it's a steep hill for most smokers to climb.

“Nicotine is the worst addiction of all the addictive chemicals,” says Myre, herself an ex-smoker. Of the almost 800 veterans who attended the first class of VA Healthcare System of Ohio's 12-week program, about 25 percent remained smoke-free after a year. This is a figure she finds “respectable” but certainly beatable. “We'd like it to be 100 percent,” she says, “but smoking is a disease of relapse.”

Among the heaviest users of tobacco are veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Myre's strong words of advice to this group: “Nip your habit in the bud. If you quit before you're 30, there's a good chance you can avoid such adverse health effects as heart disease, respiratory problems and impotence.”

The advantage of professional help

Many resources are now available to help improve the odds of smokers who are determined to quit. According to Myre, patches and medications double their chances of becoming tobacco-free. And behavioral support from counselors triples their chances.

Each medical center within VA Healthcare System of Ohio offers a smoking cessation program. Initially, each applicant is assessed by a nurse practitioner, followed by weekly group or individual sessions. At these counselor-led meetings, veterans learn about addiction “triggers” and how to deal with the emotions and anxieties that often arise

during smoking cessation. Nicotine replacement patches or medications may also be prescribed to help smokers break the habit. **VH**



Know the statistics

Here are the hard facts about smoking from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death.
- Smoking is responsible for one in five deaths nationwide, or about 438,000 people each year.
- An estimated 38,000 of those deaths are the result of exposure to secondhand smoke.
- On average, smokers die 13 to 14 years earlier than nonsmokers.
- Smoking costs more than \$193 billion annually in the form of lost productivity and health-care expenses.

Quit smoking today

For more information about the smoking cessation program, call **1-888-838-6446** or contact your local VA center.

Reaching us is easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

Chillicothe VAMC

17273 State Route 104
Chillicothe, OH 45601
740-773-1141

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Athens

510 West Union Street
Athens, OH 45701
740-593-7314

Cambridge

2145 Southgate
Cambridge, OH 43725
740-432-1963

Lancaster

1550 Sheridan Drive,
Suite 100
Colonnade Medical
Building
Lancaster, OH 43130
740-653-6145

Marietta

418 Colegate Drive
Marietta, OH 45750
740-568-0412

Portsmouth

621 Broadway Street
Portsmouth, OH 45662
740-353-3236

Cincinnati VAMC

3200 Vine Street
Cincinnati, OH 45220
513-861-3100

Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075
859-572-6202

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Bellevue

103 Landmark Drive
Bellevue, KY 41073
859-392-3840

Clermont County

Eastgate Professional
Office Park
4355 Ferguson Drive, Suite 270
Cincinnati, OH 45245
513-943-3680

Hamilton

1755 South Erie Highway
Hamilton, OH 45011
513-870-9444

Dearborn County

1600 Flossie Drive
Greendale IN 47025
812-539-2313

Florence, KY

7711 Ewing Boulevard
Florence, KY 41042
859-282-4480

Louis Stokes Wade Park VAMC

10701 East Boulevard
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-791-3800

Brecksville VA Medical Center

10000 Brecksville Road
Brecksville, OH 44141
440-526-3030

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Akron

55 West Waterloo
Akron, OH 44319
330-724-7715

Canton

733 Market Avenue South
Canton, OH 44702
330-489-4600

East Liverpool

Ogilvie Square
15655 State Route 170
Cuttata, OH 43920
330-386-4303

Lorain

205 West 20th Street
Lorain, OH 44052
440-244-3833

Mansfield

1456 Park Avenue West
Mansfield, OH 44906
419-529-4602

McCafferty

4242 Lorain Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44113
216-939-0699

New Philadelphia

1260 Monroe Avenue, #15H
New Philadelphia, OH 44663
330-602-5339

Painesville

7 West Jackson Street
Painesville, OH 44077
440-357-6740

Ravenna

6751 North Chestnut Street
Ravenna, OH 44266
330-296-3641

Sandusky

3416 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, OH 44870
419-625-7350

Warren

1460 Tod Avenue
Warren, OH 44485
330-392-0311

Youngstown

2031 Belmont Avenue
Youngstown, OH 44505
330-740-9200

Chalmers P. Wylie Outpatient Clinic

543 Taylor Avenue
Columbus, OH 43203
614-257-5200

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Grove City

1953 Ohio Avenue
Grove City, OH 43123
614-257-5800

Marion

1203 Delaware Avenue
Marion, OH 43302
740-223-8089

Newark

1912 Tamarack Road
Newark, OH 43055
740-788-8329

Zanesville

840 Bethesda Drive
Building 3A
Zanesville, OH 43701
740-453-7725

Dayton VAMC

4100 West Third Street
Dayton, OH 45428
937-268-6511

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Lima

1303 Bellefontaine Avenue
Lima, OH 45804
419-222-5788

Middletown

675 North University Boulevard
Middletown, OH 45042
513-423-8387

Richmond

4351 South A Street
Richmond, IN 47374
765-973-6915

Springfield

512 South Burnett Road
Springfield, OH 45505
937-328-3385

Call Tele-Nurse at 1-888-838-6446. • Visit us online at www.visn10.va.gov.

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