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VA



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

VETERANS Health

SUMMER 2023

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

MATTERS



PACT Act for Women
Veterans: You Belong at VA

Understanding PTSD

Managing Stress With
VA Whole Health



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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 to:

visn8communicationoffice@va.gov
Visit VISN 8 on the web: www.visn8.va.gov

To Our Readers



The new PACT Act is expanding VA health care benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances. This is a "shout-out" to all Women Veterans to take advantage of this benefit expansion. Learn more on page three, including how to apply, or re-apply if your claim was previously denied.

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that many Veterans have experienced. If you are concerned that you or a loved one is still struggling after experiencing a traumatic event, be sure to read pages four and five. Learn the signs and symptoms of PTSD. Read about effective treatment options, how family members can help, and many other VA resources.

Are you looking for effective ways to manage stress? On page six, learn about VA's many Whole Health services, programs, and classes that can help keep your stress levels in check.

Cool off this summer with a healthy smoothie made with simple ingredients. Try out the recipe on page seven. And give your brain a workout with the word puzzle.

Be well and stay safe!

David B. Isaacks, FACHE
Network Director, VISN 8

VA App Highlight – PTSD Coach



The PTSD Coach app was designed for Veterans who experience symptoms of PTSD. You do not have to be in treatment for PTSD to use this app, but it is not a replacement for therapy. Features of the app include:

- Reliable information and treatments that work
- Tools for screening and tracking symptoms
- Easy-to-use stress management tools
- Direct links to support and help

If you do not have a smartphone but have a computer with internet access, try PTSD Coach Online. The online version includes additional tools and videos for problem-solving and setting and understanding your goals. Visit **www.mobile.va.gov/app/ptsd-coach** to learn more.

PACT Act for Woman Veterans: You Belong at VA

The PACT Act is a new law that expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances. Women Veterans, we know you were there, too. VA is here for you.

The Act expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures and for Veterans of the Vietnam era, Gulf War era, and Post-9/11 era.



What expanded or new presumptive conditions did the PACT Act create?

- Gulf War and Post-9/11 Veterans: These include any type of the following cancers: brain, glioblastoma, respiratory (breathing related), gastrointestinal, head, lymphoma, neck, pancreatic, and reproductive, including cervical, ovarian, uterine, breast, vaginal, and vulvar.
- Vietnam Veterans and other Veterans exposed to tactical herbicides: These include two Agent Orange presumptive conditions: High blood pressure (hypertension) and monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS).

How can Veterans apply for VA health care benefits?

- Apply online at www.VA.gov/health-care/apply/application/introduction.
- Call our toll-free hotline at 877-222-8387, M-F, 8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. ET.
- Mail a completed and signed Application for Health Benefits (www.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/VA_Form_10-10EZ.pdf) to:
Health Eligibility Center
2957 Clairmont Rd.
Ste 200
Atlanta, GA 30329
- Bring a completed, signed VA Form 10-10EZ to your nearest medical center or clinic.

How can Veterans file a claim?

Veterans must complete VA Form 21-526EZ (www.va.gov/find-forms/about-form-21-526ez) to apply for benefits and submit any supportive evidence. Learn more about how to submit a claim at www.VA.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/when-to-file.

If Veterans were previously denied a claim, what can they do?

VA will contact Veterans when a presumption of service connection is established or changed. However, Veterans previously denied a toxic exposure-related claim are encouraged to file a supplemental claim. Once a supplemental claim is received, VA will review the claim under the new PACT law.

To learn more about the PACT Act, please visit www.VA.gov/PACT.



Understanding Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

It is normal to have stress reactions after going through or seeing a life-threatening or traumatic event. These reactions may include trouble sleeping, feeling on edge, or having upsetting memories. But, if it has been longer than a few months and you are still having upsetting thoughts and feelings that disrupt your daily life, you may have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).



Risk Factors & Causes

Anyone can develop PTSD, but some factors increase the risk for PTSD. These include having a very intense or long-term traumatic event or getting injured during that event. Survivors of natural disasters or mass violence are examples. Veterans are more likely to develop PTSD than civilians, especially if they deployed to a war zone. Another cause of PTSD is military sexual trauma (MST). This is any type of sexual harassment or sexual assault that occurs while any person is in the military during peacetime, training, or war.

Signs & Symptoms

These usually start soon after the traumatic event but can also appear months or years later. Symptoms may not be the same for everyone:

- You relive the event. This includes having nightmares, flashbacks, or reliving the traumatic event when something triggers you, like news reports or fireworks.
- You avoid reminders of the event. For example, you may avoid driving if your military convoy was bombed. Or you may keep busy, so you don't have to think or talk about the event.

- You have more negative thoughts and feelings. You may feel numb and lose interest in things you used to enjoy. Or you may feel guilt or shame for not doing more to help prevent the traumatic event.
- You feel on edge or keyed up. You are always on the lookout for danger. You may also suddenly become angry and irritable or have trouble sleeping or concentrating. Acting in unhealthy ways can also happen, like driving aggressively or abusing drugs or alcohol.




Veterans Crisis Line

DIAL 988 then PRESS 1

Treatment Works

Getting better may mean getting rid of symptoms completely. Or it may mean living with fewer or less intense symptoms:

- Trauma-focused psychotherapies (counseling or talk therapies): These are the most effective types of treatment. They help you change how you think about the trauma, so the memories no longer upset you. Eye Movement Desensitization and Processing (EMDR) is sometimes used during talk therapy. This technique uses different sounds or hand movements to help your brain work through traumatic memories.
- Medicines: Sometimes, medicines are used, often in combination with talk therapy.

Connect to Care

All VA Medical Centers provide PTSD treatment programs. Many also offer programs specifically for women Veterans. Vet Centers offer counseling services and more. You can also ask your provider to recommend a therapist, counselor, or other mental health provider. To learn more visit www.ptsd.va.gov/gethelp/find_therapist.asp.

Veterans may be able to receive VA care for MST even if they are not eligible for other VA care. MST-related services are available at every VA medical center and many VA community-based outpatient clinics. Contact the MST Coordinator at your nearest VA health care facility to learn more.

Resources for Veterans & Their Families

- If you or a loved one is in crisis or need immediate assistance, call 988, text 838255, or visit www.veteranscrisisline.net to reach caring, qualified responders 24/7.
- PTSD Family Coach App: In addition to the PTSD Coach App (see page two), this app is helpful for family members of those living with PTSD.
- Mindfulness Coach App: Mindfulness exercises to help cope with difficult emotions and pain
- Beyond MST App: Specialized tools for survivors of MST to help cope with challenges, manage symptoms, and track recovery progress
- VA Caregiver Support Program (www.caregiver.va.gov): Visit online or call toll-free 1-855-260-3274.
- VA Online Training (www.veterantraining.va.gov): Courses include problem-solving skills, anger management, and sleep issues.
- Vet Centers (www.vetcenter.va.gov): Counseling services, including for MST. Call 1-877-927-8387 to talk to a fellow combat Veteran.
- AboutFace (www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/AboutFace): Basics about PTSD, effective treatment options, and stories from Veterans and their families about living with PTSD

For more information and resources about PTSD visit www.ptsd.va.gov.

How Loved Ones Can Help

When someone has PTSD, it can change family life. There are many things loved ones can do to help:

- Learn as much as you can about PTSD so you know what your loved one is going through. This will help you and your family cope better.
- Offer to go to doctor and therapy visits. Participate in family therapy when recommended.
- Be physically active together. Exercise helps clear the mind and boosts mood.
- Plan family activities. Do things that your family enjoys.
- Encourage contact with family and friends. Having a support system will help your loved one cope with stress.
- Give your loved one space, when needed. They may withdraw and not want to be around people at certain times.

Managing Stress With VA Whole Health

VA Whole Health is an approach to health care that focuses on the whole person. This includes their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. It is a Veteran-centered approach that emphasizes self-care. It empowers individuals to take an active role in their own health and well-being.



How Stress Hurts

An important part of overall health is the ability to manage stress. The World Health Organization defines stress as any type of internal or external change that causes physical, emotional, or psychological strain.

In stressful moments, our brain releases hormones, like adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones help us focus, react, and avoid dangerous situations. While stress is natural and can be good for us, too much stress over a long period of time can damage our mental, emotional, and physical health.

Whole Health Helps

Whole Health is one way VA helps Veterans develop skills to manage stress, reduce its negative side effects, and improve overall well-being. Whole Health services and classes are available at all VA health care facilities in VISN 8. These include acupuncture, meditation, mindfulness, guided imagery, nutrition, yoga, tai chi, and biofeedback.

Biofeedback is a therapy that uses your body's signals, like heart rate, body temperature, and muscle tension to bring about healthy changes. This can improve health issues that are caused or worsened by stress.



Learn More

Veterans interested in the Whole Health Program can also check out the Live Whole Health app. The app offers many helpful resources, such as activity suggestions, meditation and relaxation techniques, and virtual coaching. To learn more about this app, please visit:

www.mobile.va.gov/app/live-whole-health



Veterans can also visit the VA's #LiveWholeHealth blog for on-demand activities at www.news.va.gov/category/health/livewholehealth.

To get started with Whole Health, please speak with your primary care provider.



Watch the Video!

View the video, "Manage Stress With VA Whole Health" at visn8.va.gov/visn8/news/publications.asp.

Word Scramble

Unscramble these words that appear in this issue of *Veterans Health Matters*.

OIKBCAEFDB _____

RCANEC _____

IMALC _____

SHAFKABSLC _____

DINAMIEOTT _____

CTPA TCA _____

SDTP _____

RESSTS _____

AKLTYHEAPRT _____

OMENW SEERNVAT _____

Strawberry-Banana Oatmeal Smoothie

INGREDIENTS

1/4 cup uncooked old fashioned (rolled) oats

2 teaspoons chia seeds or ground flax seeds (optional)

1 cup low-fat (1%) milk

1/4 cup nonfat Greek yogurt (plain or any flavor)

1/2 cup strawberries, tops removed

1 small, ripe banana (or 1/2 large)

1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS

1. Add the oats and chia seeds or ground flax seed (if using) to the pitcher of a blender. Blend on high until the texture looks like flour.
2. Add the milk and use a spoon or rubber spatula to combine it with the oat mixture.
3. Add the yogurt, strawberries, banana, and vanilla. Blend until smooth and fully combined, about 2-3 minutes.
4. Transfer to a 2-cup mason jar or storage container with a tightly fitting lid. Cover and refrigerate overnight (or at least 4 hours) to soften the oats and chia seeds or ground flax seeds.
5. Shake well and divide into two serving glasses. Serve cold.



Nutritional information:

(2 servings): Per serving: 170 calories, 3 g total fat, 1 g saturated fat, 26 g carbohydrates, 3 g dietary fiber, 11 g protein, and 80 mg sodium.

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American Institute for Preventive Medicine
c/o VISN 8 – VHM
30445 Northwestern Hwy., Ste. 150
Farmington Hills, MI 48334

(Please print)

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Address

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State

Zip

By Email:

VISN8VHM@healthylife.com
Be sure to include the above information.

By Phone:

(800) 345-2476 – press 5 for English or press 6 for Spanish



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

VISN 8 Office of Communication
 13000 Bruce B. Downs Blvd.
 Tampa, FL 33612



Be Prepared

Hurricane Season is June 1 – November 30.
 Visit www.visn8.va.gov/emergency_preparedness.asp for tips and resources.

VA Sunshine Healthcare Network

www.visn8.va.gov



at all Medical Centers

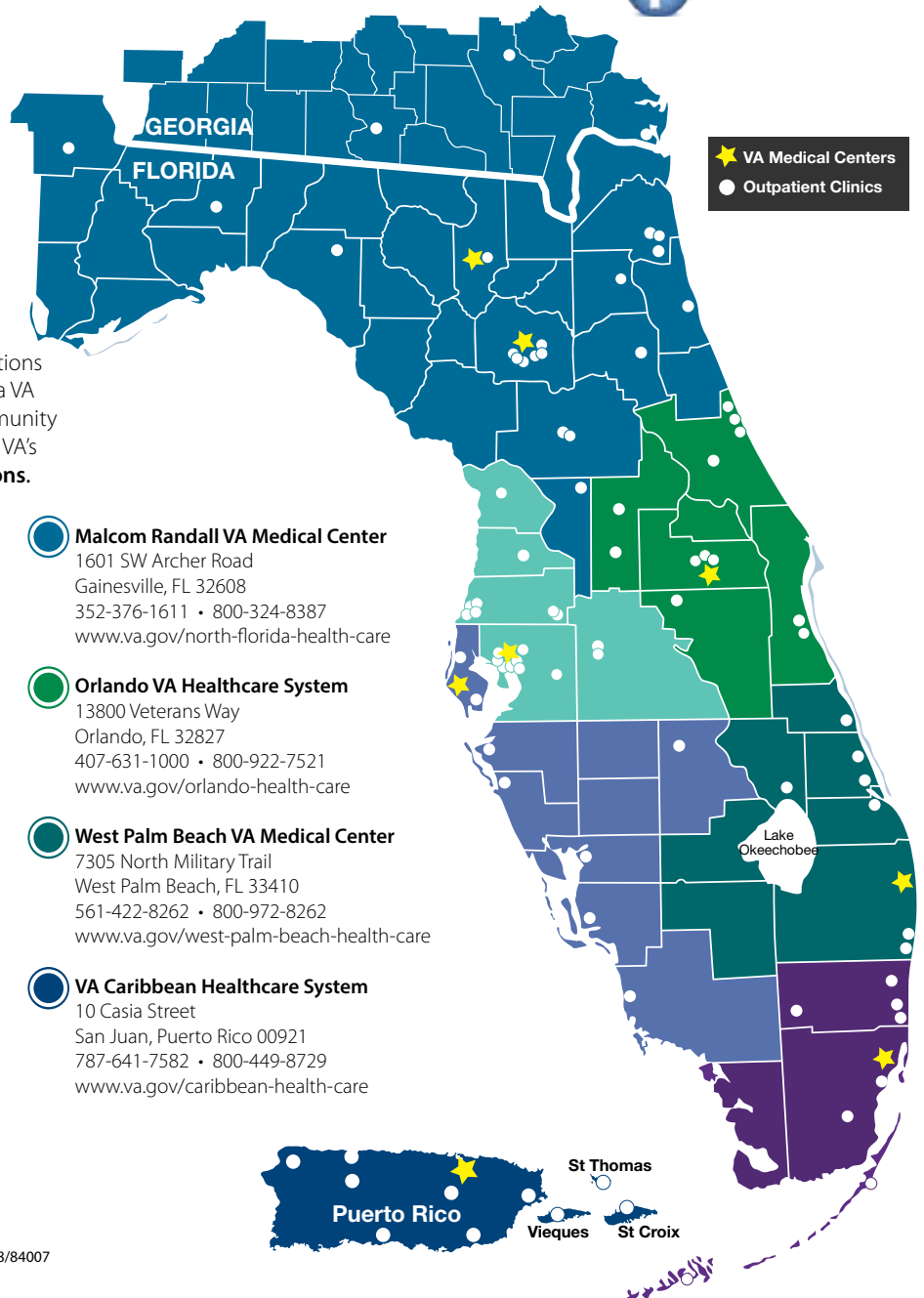


The Right Care, Right Now

1-877-741-3400

24/7/365 Virtual Urgent Care

NOTE: This map shows medical center locations only and associated service areas. To locate a VA healthcare center, outpatient clinic, or community based outpatient clinic near you, please use VA's facility locator at: www.va.gov/find-locations.



Bruce W. Carter Dept. of VA Medical Center
 1201 NW 16th Street
 Miami, FL 33125
 305-575-7000 • 888-276-1785
www.va.gov/miami-health-care

C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center
 10000 Bay Pines Blvd.
 Bay Pines, FL 33744
 727-398-6661 • 888-820-0230
www.va.gov/bay-pines-health-care

James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital
 13000 Bruce B. Downs Blvd.
 Tampa, FL 33612
 813-972-2000 • 888-716-7787
www.va.gov/tampa-health-care

Lake City VA Medical Center
 619 South Marion Avenue
 Lake City, FL 32025
 386-755-3016 • 800-308-8387
www.va.gov/north-florida-health-care

Malcom Randall VA Medical Center
 1601 SW Archer Road
 Gainesville, FL 32608
 352-376-1611 • 800-324-8387
www.va.gov/north-florida-health-care

Orlando VA Healthcare System
 13800 Veterans Way
 Orlando, FL 32827
 407-631-1000 • 800-922-7521
www.va.gov/orlando-health-care

West Palm Beach VA Medical Center
 7305 North Military Trail
 West Palm Beach, FL 33410
 561-422-8262 • 800-972-8262
www.va.gov/west-palm-beach-health-care

VA Caribbean Healthcare System
 10 Casia Street
 San Juan, Puerto Rico 00921
 787-641-7582 • 800-449-8729
www.va.gov/caribbean-health-care