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VETERANS Health MATTERS

WINTER 2023

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



Living Healthy With Diabetes:
Finding Your Balance

Managing High
Blood Pressure

Planning & Preparing
Your Spring Garden



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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:

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To Our Readers



Many Veterans are living with chronic health conditions, such as high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes. While there may be challenges to living healthy with either of these conditions, your VA health care team is here to support you with treatment options and resources. Together, you will develop a treatment plan and set goals that work for you. On pages three to five, read about key actions you can take to live well and thrive

with high blood pressure or diabetes. Plus, learn where you can find out if you are eligible to receive service-connected disability with either of these conditions.

Gardening can be a part of a healthy lifestyle that helps manage high blood pressure or diabetes, along with being an enjoyable and rewarding pastime. With spring right around the corner, check out tips for getting your spring garden ready on page six.

Looking for a sweet treat that is low in carbohydrates? On page seven, try the recipe and also train your brain with the word search puzzle.

Be well and stay safe!

David B. Isaacks, FACHE
Network Director, VISN 8

VA Mobile App Highlight: Safety Plan

The free VA Safety Plan mobile app is for anyone who has experienced suicidal thoughts. The app helps you identify personal coping strategies and sources of support. This gives suicidal thoughts time to decrease and become more manageable. With Safety Plan you can:

- Create a custom step-by-step action plan to keep yourself safe during a crisis.
- Make a list of your personal reasons to live (and add photo and video reminders).

- Try different coping strategies when you feel like you're heading toward a crisis.
- Access crisis support resources, like the Veterans Crisis Line.
- Track your mood and other mental health symptoms.
- Set goals and track your progress.



To learn more and to download this app, visit mobile.va.gov/app/safety-plan.

Managing High Blood Pressure

Are you one of the millions of Americans who have high blood pressure (hypertension)? The good news is that when you make heart-healthy choices, alone or with medicines, you can control this chronic condition. Work with your health care team to develop a treatment plan and set a blood pressure target. Then, work on the following goals to reach your target.



Know Your Numbers

Get your blood pressure checked as often as your provider advises. This may include checking your blood pressure at home or at a pharmacy. Self-monitoring alerts you to changes in your numbers or if the healthy changes you make are working.

Eat a Healthy Diet

Limit salt to less than 2,300 mg per day and learn to read food labels. Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits. Include whole grains, such as brown rice and bran cereals. Choose low-fat dairy products along with lean meats, fish, or chicken, and beans and lentils. Ask about the DASH eating plan, which is proven to reduce blood pressure.

Move Your Body

Find physical activities you enjoy doing. Aim for at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise on most days. This might include walking, jogging, cycling, swimming, doing yard work, fitness classes, dancing, and gardening. Being active, along with a healthy diet, can help with weight loss, too. Extra weight strains your heart and raises blood pressure. Losing just 10 pounds may help you reach your blood pressure target.

Manage Stress

Find ways to relax and unwind every day, including hobbies, breathing exercises, and spending time in nature. Visit with friends and family. Volunteer to help others. Talk over your problems with people you trust.

Limit Alcohol & Quit Tobacco

Ask your provider about the many VA tools and resources available to help you quit or to help you limit or avoid alcohol.

Take Medicines

Sometimes, heart-healthy habits are not enough to control high blood pressure. Your provider may also prescribe medicine for you to take.

When to Get Emergency Help

Get immediate medical attention if blood pressure readings are equal to or above 180/120 or if you have symptoms of heart attack or stroke.



Did you know high blood pressure is a presumptive condition from exposure to Agent Orange and you may be entitled to service-connected disability? Scan this QR code to learn more.



Watch the Video!

Check out the video, "Managing High Blood Pressure – One Day at a Time" at [visn8.va.gov/visn8/news/publications.asp](https://www.visn8.va.gov/visn8/news/publications.asp).

Living Healthy With Diabetes

Finding your balance

Living with diabetes is a journey. It's about managing this chronic condition while finding the right balance that works for you. Although it is not always easy to live healthy with diabetes, it is worth it, so you can live your life to the fullest.



Scan this QR code for the Veterans Health Library to learn more about living healthy with diabetes.



Why Living Healthy Matters

Diabetes happens when the body cannot properly turn food into energy. There is no cure for diabetes, but there are many things you can do to manage diabetes well and thrive. Diabetes daily self-care helps you feel good by keeping blood sugar (glucose) levels in a healthy range and preventing or delaying other health problems. Your VA health care team is here to help you create a diabetes management plan and to provide support and guidance along the way.

Eat Healthy

The goal is to eat healthy foods in the right amounts at the right times so your blood sugar stays on track. Your VA dietitian or diabetes educator will help you create a healthy eating plan that works for you.

- Choose healthy carbohydrates found in vegetables, whole grains, beans, fruits, and low-fat dairy or dairy alternatives.
- Avoid or limit sugary foods like candy, sweets, and sugary drinks that raise your blood sugar a lot. If you choose to eat these foods, learn how to plan for them.

Stay Active

Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days. Moving your body uses blood sugar for energy to help keep blood sugar levels in a healthy range.

- Choose activities you enjoy and mix them up, such as walking, swimming, cycling, dancing, playing pickleball, gardening, and more. Invite a friend to join you.
- Set goals that are realistic and start slowly. You can add more activity as you get stronger.
- Avoid sitting for long periods of time.



Take Medicine

You may take prescribed medicines to help manage diabetes. These may include:

- Insulin shots or other injectable medicines to move glucose from your blood into your body's cells
- Oral medicines to help your body use insulin more effectively
- Other medicines to help manage blood pressure or blood cholesterol levels. This will help prevent or delay complications, such as heart and kidney disease.

Monitor Blood Sugar

Work with your health care team to set personal blood sugar targets.

- Check your blood sugar level as often as recommended to achieve the best blood glucose control.
- Your results will help show if changes are needed in your eating plan, physical activities, or diabetes medicine.
- When sick with a cold or flu, you may need to check your blood sugar more often or check your urine for ketones. Ketones in your urine is a sign your blood sugar is too high.

Prevent or Delay Complications

- Get regular checkups with your provider. They will check your A1C (identifies blood sugar control over the past 2-3 months), weight, blood pressure, heart and kidney health, and blood cholesterol. Also, ask how to manage your blood sugar when you are sick.
- Stay up to date with eye and foot exams, dental care, immunizations, and health screenings.
- Quit if you use any form of tobacco.

Diabetes Stress Is Real

Managing diabetes can be hard and sometimes overwhelming. Find healthy ways to cope.

- Pay attention to your feelings. Talk with your health care team to help you problem-solve your concerns about diabetes.
- Share your worries with people you trust and let them help.
- Remember to pace yourself as you work on your goals. Be sure to always celebrate your progress.
- Take time to do things you truly enjoy.



Rule of 15

Learn to identify symptoms of low blood sugar (hypoglycemia), such as feeling shaky, clammy, etc. If you have symptoms, check your blood sugar if you can. If it is below the target you and your health care team set, eat 15 grams of sugar-containing food. Examples: 1/2 cup of fruit juice or regular pop, 3 teaspoons of sugar, or a few glucose tablets. Wait 15 minutes and test again. If it is still low, eat another 15 grams until blood sugar is above the target. If the person passes out or cannot swallow, get emergency medical care.



Did you know type 2 diabetes is a presumptive condition from exposure to Agent Orange and you may be entitled to service-connected disability? Scan the QR code to learn more.

Planning & Preparing Your Spring Garden

Gardening is an enjoyable and rewarding pastime that can benefit your physical and mental health. Studies show it can also help those transitioning from active duty to civilian life.

With spring right around the corner, now is a good time to prepare your garden. Luckily, you do not need a huge backyard. If you have good soil and a container, you can grow almost anything! Raised beds, pots, and even window boxes can provide enough space for gardening and make weeding and tending easier. Whether you are new to gardening or a seasoned pro, here are some tips to help get your garden ready.

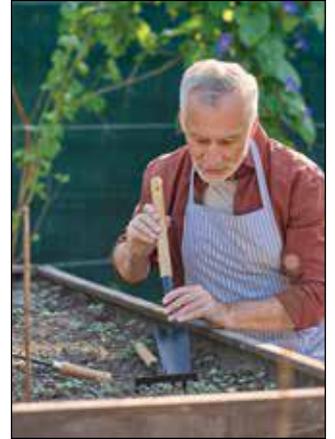


Make a Plan

Consider what vegetables you want to plant and the best places around your home for growing. Aim for spots that get 8 to 10 hours of sunlight daily and are near a water supply. If you planted a garden last year, rotate your vegetables to help avoid depleting the soil. Adding native flowers around your garden can further beautify the space and attract pollinators, like bees, butterflies, and moths.

Prepare the Soil

Purchase a kit from your local gardening center to test your soil's pH levels. A pH level of about 6.5 is ideal. Apply lime, sulfur, and fertilizer according to the soil test results and your vegetables' needs. If you have a compost pile of yard clippings and kitchen vegetable scraps, keep the compost moist. Mix it with a shovel regularly to create nutrient-rich soil. Work the composted material into the garden's soil. If using raised beds or pots, use a blend of potting mix and garden soil.



When to Plant

Look up your region's growing zone at planthardiness.ars.usda.gov to identify the best time to plant. You can plant seeds directly into the ground. Or start them indoors then transplant them outside to shorten your growing season. Another option is to buy young vegetable plants to plant. Your local extension program, usually associated with a state university, can help. They provide planting charts and information on spacing, nutrients needed, and more.

Get Connected

There are gardening programs and classes available in every state, including programs for Veterans. Ask your health care team to recommend local groups where you can learn and grow.

Word Search

Find these words from the stories in this issue of **Veterans Health Matters**. Remember to also look up, down, and backward. Have fun!

BLOOD PRESSURE	A	F	D	B	I	I	K	D	N	Q	T	Y
DANCING	M	G	T	L	A	T	L	A	S	G	J	S
DIABETES	P	N	E	O	K	M	I	N	A	C	D	L
GARDEN	H	Y	P	O	G	L	Y	C	E	M	I	A
GLUCOSE	M	G	L	D	O	Q	S	I	U	W	A	O
GOALS	O	Y	A	P	C	F	E	N	J	L	B	G
HYPOGLYCEMIA	N	E	D	R	A	G	M	G	R	V	E	S
MONITOR	I	B	F	E	I	N	L	P	D	D	T	P
SALT	T	Y	Y	S	F	T	I	W	E	L	E	L
SOIL	O	D	H	S	K	M	O	P	R	V	S	A
VEGETABLES	R	G	L	U	C	O	S	E	D	G	I	M
	N	U	A	R	W	B	E	G	K	O	R	W
	Y	I	V	E	G	E	T	A	B	L	E	S



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

Banana Oat Cookies

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup over-ripe, mashed bananas
- 1 cup quick oats
- 1/2 low-fat, plain yogurt
- 1/4 cup water
- 1/2 cup raisins
- 1/2 cup unsalted sunflower seeds
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon



DIRECTIONS

1. In a medium mixing bowl, mash bananas.
2. Add yogurt, water, and mix. Add quick (not instant) oats and mix well.
3. Add raisins, sunflower seeds, and cinnamon. Mix well. The batter should be thick and easy to spoon up.
4. Lightly spray a baking sheet with cooking spray. Place a tablespoon of batter on the sheet and press it to form a flat disk. Repeat with the remaining batter.
5. Bake at 350-375 °F for 20 minutes.

Nutritional information:

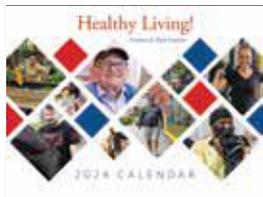
(25 servings). Per serving (1 cookie): 48 calories, 2 g total fat, 0 g saturated fat, 8 g carbohydrates, 1 g fiber, 1 g protein, and 4 mg sodium.





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



2024 Calendars Are Here!

Pick up yours during your next visit, or visit www.visn8.va.gov/news/publications.asp to download it in English or Spanish.

VA Sunshine Healthcare Network

www.visn8.va.gov



at all Medical Centers

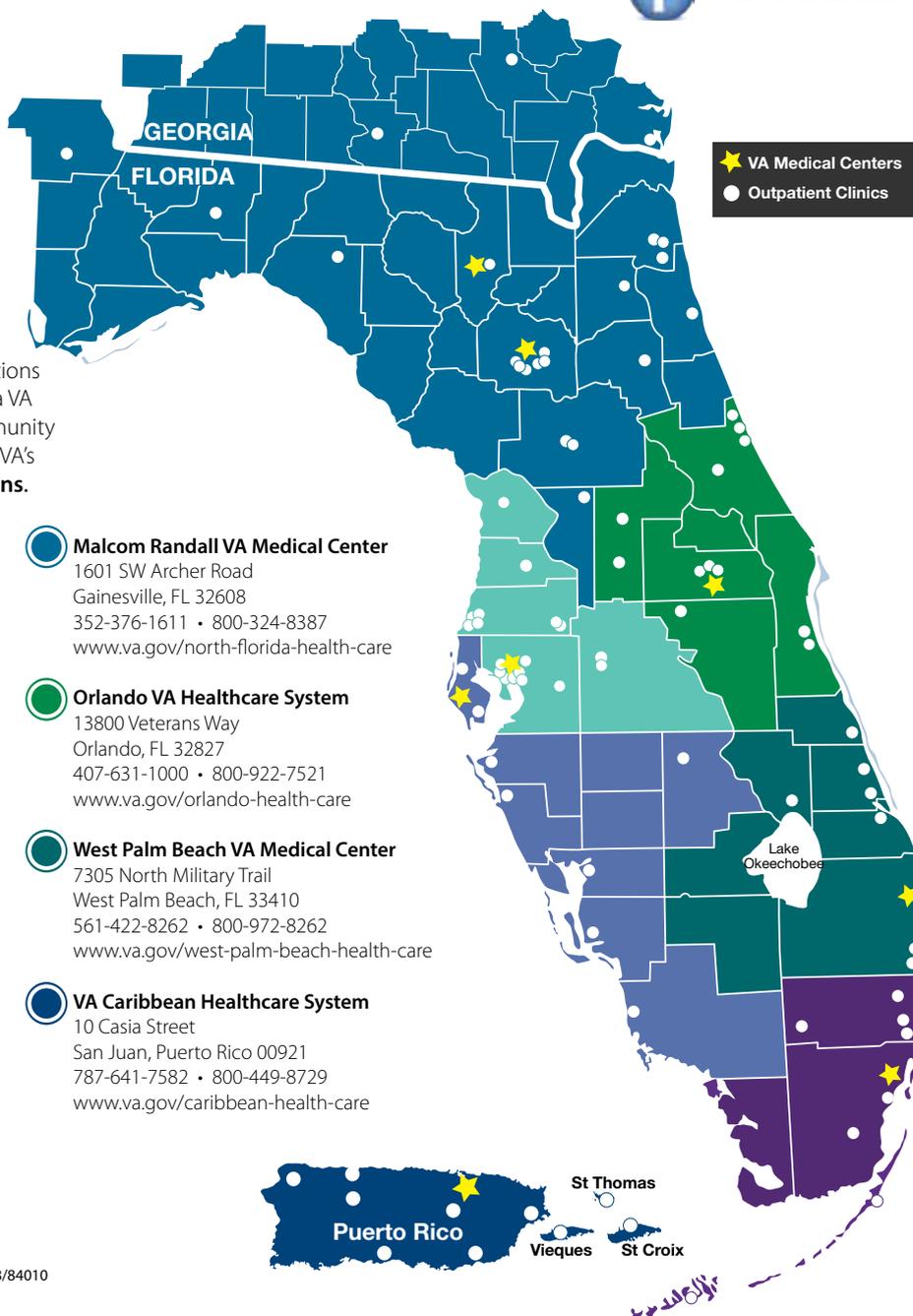


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24/7/365 Virtual Urgent Care

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
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www.va.gov/west-palm-beach-health-care

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 10 Casia Street
 San Juan, Puerto Rico 00921
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www.va.gov/caribbean-health-care