

TAKE THIS ISSUE HOME!

VA



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

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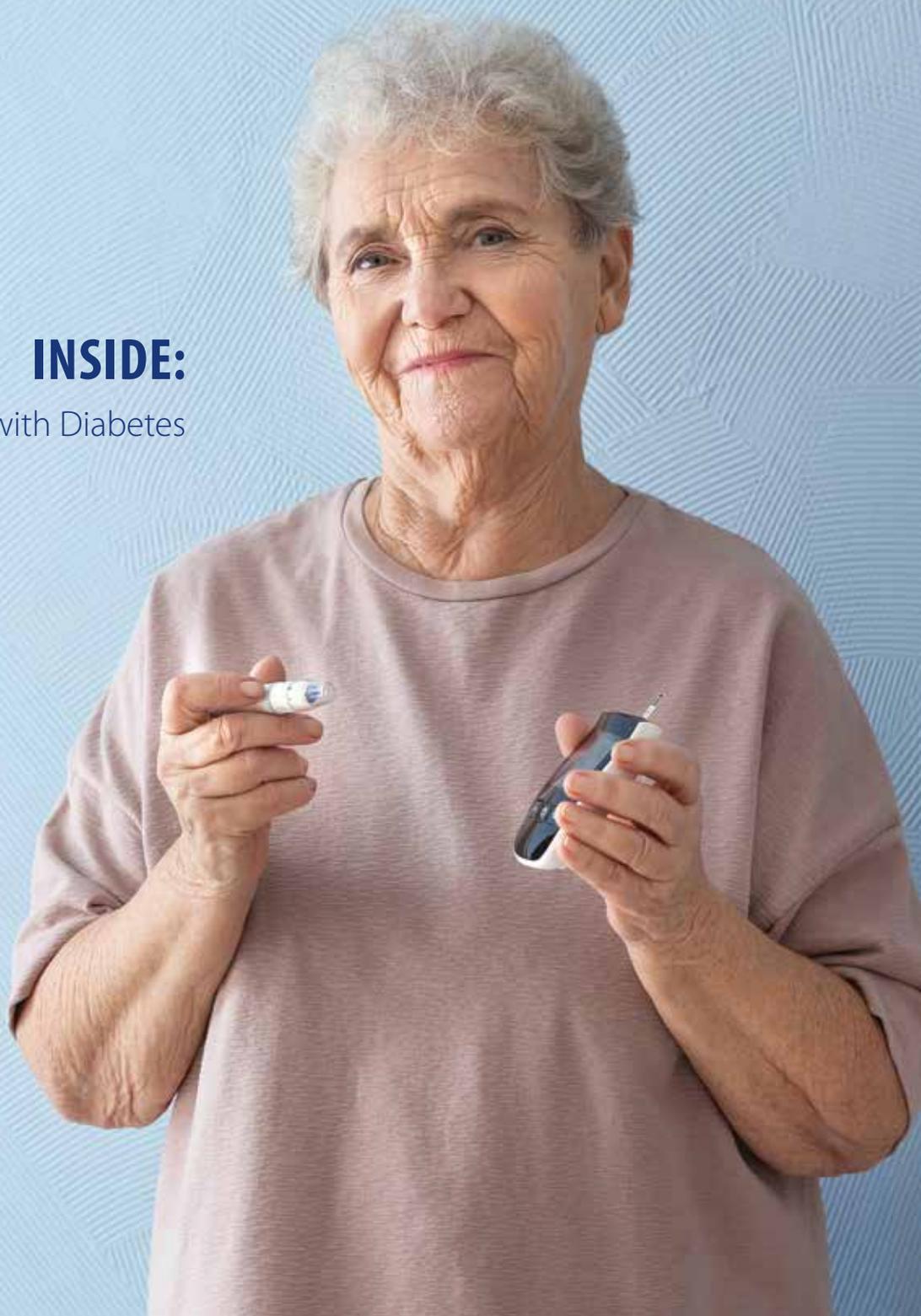
# VETERANS Health

MATTERS

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

## INSIDE:

Living Well with Diabetes



# To Our Readers

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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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Chances are, you or someone you know, is living with diabetes. That's because one in four people who seek VA health care services has diabetes. While diabetes is a serious health condition, many of our Veterans are managing their diabetes and are thriving, living their lives to the fullest. That's the goal of VA's Whole Health approach to your care. Read about the important diabetes self-care practices described on pages 4-5.

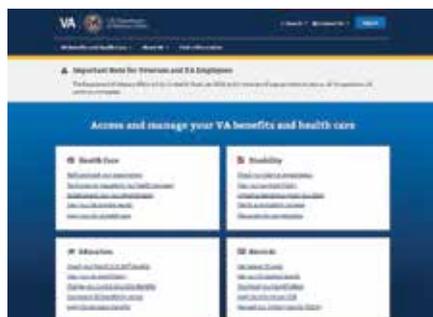
Although it's not clear whether eating too much sugar has a direct link to diabetes, a high sugar intake often leads to being overweight or obese, which are well known risk factors for diabetes. Learn how to cut back on eating hidden sugars on page 6, then check out how you can identify them on page 7 by doing the word search puzzle. You will also find an easy recipe for making your own naturally sweet frozen treat.

Finally, learn about another common health condition that affects many of us - gastroesophageal reflux, or GERD. Like diabetes, GERD can often be well managed with daily self-care practices and medication, as needed. Find out what these daily lifestyle habits are on page 3.

Be well!

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

## A New Online Experience



Did you know over 10 million people visit VA's websites each month? One of the VA's top priorities is to give customers the best possible experience the minute they encounter VA – in-person, on the phone, or online. VA recently revamped the department's primary website, VA.gov, so Veterans can easily find and access their health care information and resources for an optimal customer experience.

At first glance, the new site contains content that focuses on the top 20 tasks that 80 percent of VA's customers need. This includes the ability to log in to receive a personalized experience. Plus, all features are described in easy to understand language.

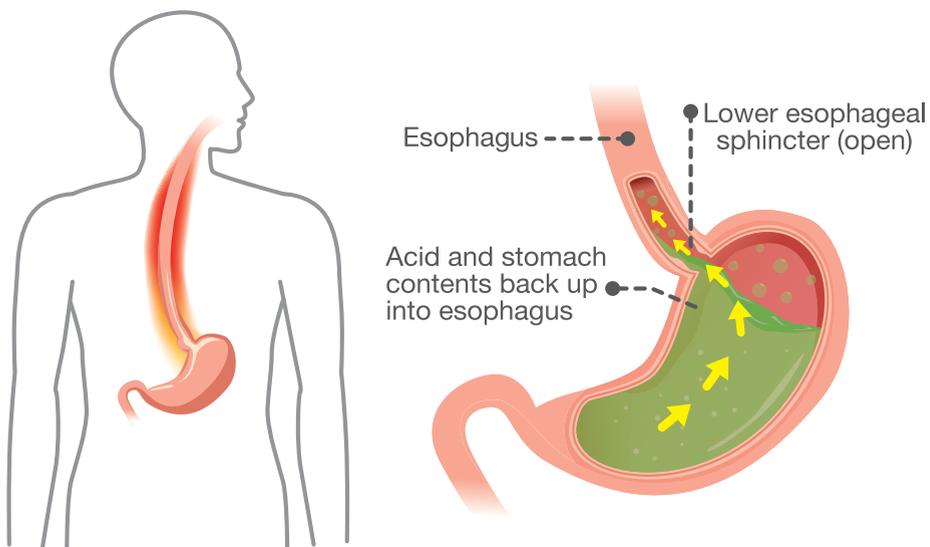
Logged in customers will find a dashboard that summarizes the status of VA medical and non-medical services they currently receive. Also, customers can now update their contact information in one location instead of visiting multiple VA websites or making multiple calls.

To experience the newly enhanced website visit [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov).

# Got GER(D)?

Heartburn, acid reflux, and acid indigestion are terms that often mean the same thing - Gastroesophageal reflux (GER).

GER happens when some of the stomach contents backs up or “refluxes” into the esophagus (food tube) because the opening into the stomach (lower esophageal sphincter) doesn’t close up properly after food enters the stomach. When the stomach acid touches the lining of the esophagus, it can cause heartburn, a burning feeling in the middle of the chest or abdomen. Other symptoms include nausea, vomiting, and belching. Stomach acid can also travel further up the esophagus, into the throat. This may cause hoarseness, chronic throat-clearing, swallowing problems, bad breath, and wearing down teeth, but may not cause heartburn.



**IMPORTANT – If you have chest pain and you are not sure if it’s heartburn or a heart attack, be safe and call 911 or get emergency medical care.**

## Who Gets GER(D)?

While GER is quite common among adults, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is longer lasting and can become a more serious health problem if not treated properly. The risk of having GER(D) increases with obesity or being overweight, pregnancy, smoking or being exposed to secondhand smoke, taking certain medications, or other conditions, such as a hiatal hernia.

## CALL YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER RIGHT AWAY IF YOU:

- Vomit large amounts; have green/yellow vomit or contains blood; or have vomit fluid that looks like coffee grounds
- Have problems breathing after vomiting occurs
- Have pain swallowing in your mouth or throat

## MANAGING GER(D)

Your VA health care provider may recommend lifestyle changes, medications, surgery, or a combination.

### LIFESTYLE CHANGES

- Avoid or limit foods that are high-fat or spicy, high-acid (e.g., tomato or citrus), chocolate, peppermint, and carbonated and alcoholic beverages.
- Avoid over-eating and do not eat three hours before bedtime.
- Sleep on a slight angle by using an extra pillow or by raising the head of your bed about six to eight inches.
- Lose weight, if you are overweight or obese.
- Quit smoking and avoid secondhand smoke.

### MEDICATIONS

Over-the-counter medications, such as antacids, may also help relieve symptoms. Other medications can reduce how much acid your stomach produces or move food faster through your stomach so it doesn’t reflux. But, if your symptoms don’t get better, see your health care provider.

### SURGERY

If surgery is recommended, the most common is fundoplication, which uses a thin tube with a tiny video camera. Part of the stomach is wrapped around the esophagus, which helps reduce reflux by increasing pressure at the lower end of the esophagus.

# Living Well with Diabetes

There's a good chance that you, or someone you know, is living with diabetes. That's because diabetes is increasing, mostly due to rising rates of obesity from unhealthy eating habits and being physically inactive. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about one in ten Americans has diabetes. When it comes to Veterans, diabetes affects one in four of VA's patients.

## What is Diabetes?

Diabetes occurs when the body has problems using the energy or "glucose" it gets from foods. This causes too much glucose or sugar to stay in the blood. Insulin that comes from your pancreas allows the body to use glucose for energy. But, if the body cannot make insulin, Type 1 diabetes occurs. If the body cannot make enough insulin, or use it properly, Type 2 diabetes occurs. Ninety-five percent of diabetes in adults is Type 2.

## You Are in the Driver's Seat.

While diabetes does not have a cure, you can manage it well and thrive. That's the goal of VA's Whole Health approach to your care—getting VA health care when you need it and taking good care of yourself on a daily basis.

Diabetes self-care activities help you feel good, keep blood glucose in a healthy range, and prevent or delay having complications later. Read on to learn about living life to the fullest when you have diabetes.



## HEALTHY EATING

Eating healthy, balanced meals and snacks spaced throughout the day helps keep your blood glucose in a healthy range. Healthy carbohydrates, found in vegetables, whole grains, beans, fruits, and low-fat dairy foods, break down into glucose. Your body uses this glucose for energy. Sugary foods like candy, sweets, and regular soda raise blood glucose a lot so you need to plan for them or choose to avoid them. Your VA health care team can help you develop a healthy eating plan.



## BEING ACTIVE

Physical activity uses blood glucose for energy, which also helps keep your blood sugar levels on target. Plus, being active helps you lose weight, lower cholesterol, and improve blood pressure. Choose activities you enjoy and set goals that are realistic. You may start by moving just a little more, then add more physical activity into your day as you get stronger. It may also help to break up activities into 10-minute sessions, aiming for 30 minutes a day, on five or more days a week.



## TAKING MEDICATION

Daily medications may include insulin and/or pills to help maintain healthy blood sugar levels. Other medications help manage blood pressure and cholesterol levels to reduce risk of complications, such as heart and kidney disease.



## MONITORING BLOOD SUGAR

Monitoring your own blood glucose levels is often recommended so you know if you need to make changes to your food or to your activity. Some people may check their levels a few times a week, or up to a few times a day to help get the best blood glucose control.



### REDUCING RISK FOR DIABETES COMPLICATIONS

- Be tobacco-free.
- See your doctor regularly to check your A1C (average blood sugar control over the past 2-3 months), along with your weight, blood pressure, kidney, heart, and blood cholesterol tests.
- Have an eye exam once per year.
- Check feet regularly.
- Get a dental checkup twice a year.
- Get recommended immunizations, including an annual flu shot.
- Keep track of blood glucose levels and other test results.



### HEALTHY COPING

Have a solid network of people you can turn to when things get tough. Meet up with other people who have diabetes to remind yourself you are not alone. And, it's just as important to always celebrate the progress you've made toward your goals.

## LOWS & HIGHS

### Hypoglycemia ("low" blood sugar)

This can happen if you skip meals or wait too long to eat; exercise more often than usual; and/or take too much diabetes medication or insulin. Symptoms include feeling shaky, anxious, clammy, irritable or confused; rapid pulse; sudden blurred vision; tingling/numbness in the lips or cheeks; headache; clumsiness; feeling faint; or passing out.

**WHAT TO DO:** Check blood sugar. If below the target set by you and your health care team, eat sugar-containing food (½ cup of fruit juice or regular pop, or 4 teaspoons of sugar, or a few glucose tablets). Wait 15 minutes, then re-check blood sugar. If still low, eat sugar-containing food again until blood sugar is above the target number. Then, eat a snack or meal. If the person passes out or can't swallow, get emergency medical care.

### Hyperglycemia ("high" blood sugar)

This can happen if you get sick, eat too much, don't do your normal exercises, or don't take your insulin or diabetes pills properly. Symptoms include extreme thirst, urinating often, nausea, irritability, dry itchy skin, sleepiness, and blurred vision.

**WHAT TO DO:** Check your blood sugar. If above the set target or if you are sick, you may need to check your urine for ketones, or get emergency care right away, especially if you cannot reach your doctor for advice.



**Your VA health care team is here to guide and support you, at every step of your diabetes journey!**

For more information on Living with Diabetes visit: [www.veteranshealthlibrary.org/LivingWith/Diabetes](http://www.veteranshealthlibrary.org/LivingWith/Diabetes)



### Watch the Video!

You can view the video version of "Living Well with Diabetes" at [www.visn8.va.gov/VISN8/news/publications.asp](http://www.visn8.va.gov/VISN8/news/publications.asp).

# Cutting Back on Sugar

Health experts agree - consuming too much sugar is bad for our health. Excess sugar is strongly linked to heart disease, and to obesity, which is a major risk factor for type 2 diabetes and other chronic conditions.

Yes, our body needs some sugar for energy, but we can get energy from foods that contain sugar naturally, like fruit and dairy. Energy also comes from other healthy carbohydrates ("carbs"), such as whole grains, starchy vegetables, beans, and lentils. The problem is that many people consume a lot more sugar than they realize by eating too much "added" sugars. These are sugars and syrups added to foods during processing or just before you eat them.

Major sources of added sugars in our diet are regular soft drinks, candy, baked sweets, fruit punch, dairy desserts, and sweetened grains like ready-to-eat breakfast cereals.

## 8 Ways to Reduce Sugars:

- **Limit sugar-filled drinks** – Cut back slowly and work up to drinking more water. Try plain sparkling water flavored with slices of lemon or a few berries.
- **Cut sugar in half** – Try this for things you eat or drink often like cereal, pancakes, coffee, and tea.
- **Check the label** – Choose foods and drinks with less total sugar and less added sugar. Learn to identify ingredients that mean sugar (see word search puzzle on page 7).



- **Make it yourself** – Use less sugar to make lemonade, hot chocolate, coffee, and tea drinks. Use more natural flavors like cinnamon, citrus, or nutmeg.
- **Enjoy natural sweetness** – Bake, grill, or stew fresh, frozen, or canned fruit (in its own juice).
- **Swap ice cream** – Choose plain Greek yogurt and add fruit.
- **Use less when baking** – Reduce sugar by one-third. Swap unsweetened applesauce for some of the sugar. Or, use a non-calorie sweetener suitable for baking.
- **Back to basics** – Compare labels to choose ready-to-eat breakfast cereals that contain less added sugar. Or, make your own oatmeal and top with sliced fruit and a sprinkle of cinnamon.

## How Much Added Sugar?

Most adults consume about 18 teaspoons every day. The American Heart Association recommends daily limits of 6 teaspoons for women and 9 teaspoons for men.



*Regular soda:*  
12 oz. can = 10 tsp.



*Fruit drink:*  
20 oz. = 17 tsp.



*Chocolate chip cookie:* 5 tsp.



*Coffee latte:*  
5 tsp.



*1/6 slice pie:* 6 tsp.



*1 tsp. jam:* 1 tsp.

# Word Search

## Hidden Added Sugars in Foods

Find these words that are other names for sugar that is often added to processed foods. Remember to look up, down, and backwards. Good luck!

AGAVE NECTAR	A	L	S	C	M	E	F	Z	E	M
BEET SUGAR	G	L	U	C	O	S	E	A	J	A
DEMERARA	A	H	C	R	L	O	P	R	J	L
DEXTROSE	V	L	R	N	A	T	E	A	D	T
FRUCTOSE	E	A	O	B	S	C	S	R	E	O
GLUCOSE	N	V	S	G	S	U	O	E	X	D
HFCS (stands for high fructose corn syrup)	E	H	E	K	E	R	T	M	T	E
HONEY	C	K	I	B	S	F	L	E	R	X
MALTODEXTRIN	T	U	R	B	I	N	A	D	O	T
MALTOSE	A	H	H	F	C	S	M	U	S	R
MOLASSES	R	O	D	L	B	Y	J	P	E	I
SUCROSE	L	N	P	S	C	R	F	I	L	N
SYRUP	B	E	E	T	S	U	G	A	R	O
TURBINADO	Q	Y	T	X	H	P	J	T	X	D

## No Added Sugar Raspberry-Banana Ice Cream

Try making this sweet treat without the added sugar in regular ice cream.

### Ingredients

- 2 medium frozen bananas, cut in 2-inch slices
- ½ cup fresh or frozen raspberries
- 2 Tbsp. coconut milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

### Directions

Place all ingredients in a heavy-duty blender or food processor and blend until smooth. Pour mixture into a freezer-safe container for three hours, then enjoy!



**Nutritional information:** Serves 4. Per serving: 72 calories, 2 g total fat, 1 g saturated fat, 16 g carbohydrates, 3 g dietary fiber, 1 g protein, and 2 mg sodium.

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2. Cut out the form and insert in a stamped envelope.
3. Mail to:  
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Help your health care team get to know you better. Tell them what really matters to you in your life, what makes you happy, and your personal goals for overall health and well-being.

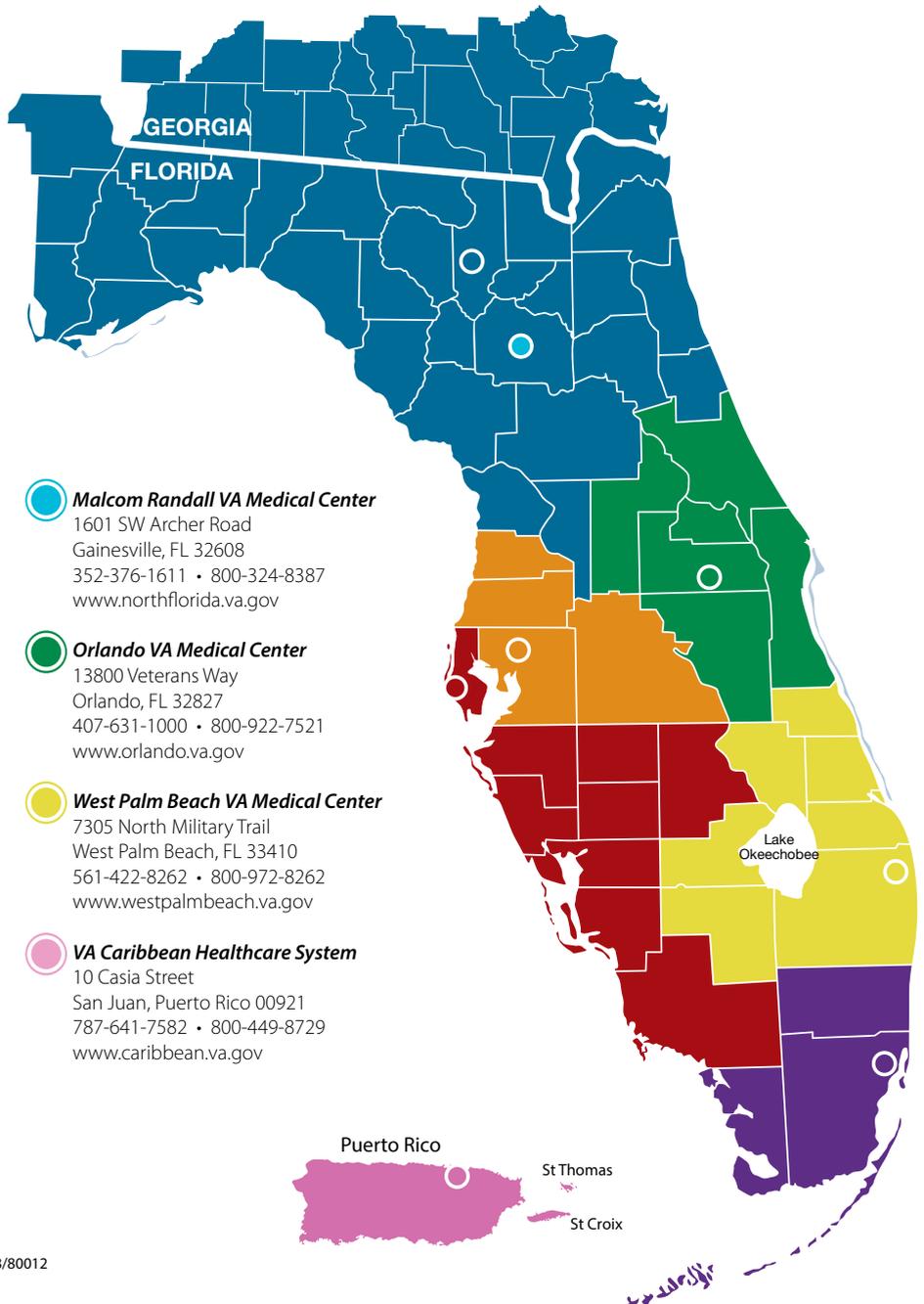
# VA Sunshine Healthcare Network

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