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

SUMMER 2019

# VETERANS Health

MATTERS

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

## INSIDE:

Type 2  
Diabetes –  
A Whole Health  
Success





# 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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In the last issue of *Veterans Health Matters*, we looked at what it's like to live with diabetes. In this issue, we're taking a deeper dive into type 2 diabetes, which is the most common form of diabetes. Read a Veteran's inspiring story on pages 4 and 5 about battling his diabetes diagnosis with determination and enthusiasm, with the help of several VA Whole Health programs.

The good news about diabetes continues on page 6 where you learn that there's a lot you can do to prevent or delay type 2 diabetes, including using more diabetes-friendly recipes, like the one featured on page 7.

VA strives to provide the best care to every person who served. For LGBT+ Veterans, that includes meeting their unique health care needs in a sensitive and respectful environment. Read more on page 3, including the role of the LGBT+ Veteran Care Coordinator in every VA medical center.

Want to save time, travel, and money? Discover how on page 7 by using VA's Video Connect system, which can connect you to your health care team from anywhere.

Be well!

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

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## New Clinical Contact Center

VISN 8 is taking it to the next level in improving access to care and Veterans' experiences through a new initiative known as the VISN 8 Clinical Contact Center. This center will make it easier and more convenient for Veterans to receive health advice, gain access to care, and obtain pharmacy services.

More simply, Veterans will be able to call one number 24/7 to get their health questions answered or their concerns addressed from the comfort and convenience of their home, or wherever they may be.



In addition to our existing nurse advice or triage services, physicians and nurse practitioners will be available for "virtual" care visits, along with pharmacy services, and administrative support. Our goal is to make all this available next month. In later phases, we will offer scheduling for primary care and other appointments. Stay tuned for more exciting information about the new center!

# We Serve All Who Served

## Services available to LGBT+ Veterans

Every Veteran has unique needs so VA makes sure to provide the correct care for all those who served. Many people might not be aware that there are unique needs and care for LGBT+ Veterans. The VA strives to be a national leader in providing high-quality LGBT+ health care in a sensitive, respectful environment.

The following is a list of the top topics LGBT+ Veterans should discuss with their VA provider:

### **Be Forthcoming**

To provide you with the best care possible, your providers should know about your sexual orientation and gender identity. This will prompt him/her to ask specific questions about you and offer appropriate health screenings, medical tests, etc.

### **Mental Health**

Mental health issues affect LGBT+ Veterans at a higher rate. These concerns may be more severe for LGBT+ Veterans who remain "in the closet" or who do not have an adequate social support system. Culturally appropriate services for LGBT+ Veterans for the prevention, early detection, and treatment of these conditions should be available at your VA. If you are in crisis, please call 911, go to your nearest Emergency Room, or call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, and press "1" for Veterans.



### **Substance Use/Alcohol**

Heavy drinking and substance use are more prevalent among LGBT+ Veterans. There are various treatments to assist Veterans on their recovery journey. LGBT+ Veterans also use tobacco at much higher rates. Tobacco-related health problems include lung disease, lung cancer, heart disease, and many other serious problems.

### **Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)**

STIs occur in sexually active LGBT+ Veterans at a high rate. Some STIs can be cured and some can be effectively managed. Because an STI can occur without symptoms, and you can transmit it to others, screening is important. Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is also available at the VA through the Infectious Disease (ID) clinic to assist in HIV prevention.

### **Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)**

Violence and aggression between intimate partners, or IPV, can include physical, sexual, or psychological abuse or stalking. It can be a single event or last for many years, and can reach far beyond the actual or threatened violence or aggression.

Every VA Medical Center has a LGBT+ Veteran Care Coordinator to help you connect with appropriate treatment and services, answer questions, and assist with any concerns you may have.

# *Ditching Diabetes & getting his life back*



**By Ed Drohan**  
**Public Affairs Specialist**

Air Force Veteran Lawrence Spinks had been feeling terrible for a while. He'd had heart problems for years, but it didn't feel anything like that.

He was weak, his legs were shaking, he had trouble walking, and was soaked in cold sweat. After several days of feeling this way, he finally drove from his home in Zephyrhills to James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital (JAHVH) in Tampa. Once he was helped getting into the emergency room, Spinks found out he was suffering from the effects of high blood sugar and diabetes.

"The emergency room doctor came in and said, 'Mr. Spinks, you have diabetes,'" 76-year-old Spinks said. "I said you must be talking about my brother, because he's seen here too, and he has diabetes. She told me that she was talking about me and said my sugar level at the time was 626. She said I should be dead."

The average person who does not have diabetes maintains a blood sugar level of about 100. Spinks' blood sugar level was so high that he was admitted to the hospital where he spent a week recuperating.

When he first went home, Spinks said, he was taking six injections of insulin a day to control his blood sugar. But he was also participating in physical therapy sessions and getting counseling from Registered Dietitian Tamara Car-Shaver at the Zephyrhills Community-Based Outpatient Clinic.



Spinks' blood sugar level was so high that he was admitted to the hospital where he spent a week recuperating.



Pictured: Air Force Veteran Lawrence Spinks of Zephyrhills, FL, right, learns how to develop a diabetes eating plan with assistance from Registered Dietitian Nicole Miller at the Zephyrhills Community Based Outpatient Clinic. VA photo by Ed Drohan.

"I told myself when I came home from the hospital that I'm not going to live this way anymore," Spinks said. "We're going to start a whole new life." He started by going through his pantry and getting rid of foods that were high in sugar and reading recipe books that were diabetes-friendly. He also started tracking his blood sugar levels and food intake every day.

Through healthy eating and exercise, his insulin shots dropped from six a day to four, then to two in just a few months. Today, he no longer uses insulin and controls his blood sugar with oral medications and hopes to continue his regimen, so he can eventually stop taking those, too.

Eating healthier and exercising has paid additional dividends for Spinks. His waist size has dropped from 44 inches to 38 inches, and his shirt size has gone from 3X to 1X. "I'm pretty close to the weight I was in high school now," he said.

According to Dave Folds, JAHVH Health Promotion Disease Prevention Coordinator, there are several Whole Health programs designed to help people who have been diagnosed with diabetes or prediabetes. These include the MOVE!® weight management program, diabetes education, healthy teaching kitchens, and diabetes prevention programs.

Each VA care team also has a registered dietitian who is available to work one-on-one with Veterans to set up healthy eating plans for managing diabetes, along with weight loss. These eating plans may also help prevent diabetes for those at high risk for diabetes, or for Veterans who have prediabetes.

As for Spinks, an incident on Valentine's Day 2019 really brought home the changes he's made. He and his sister were coming out of a restaurant and somebody was passing out candy hearts. He told her he couldn't have one because of his weight problems and his diabetes.

"She looked at me and said, 'Are you kidding me? You're the skinniest looking guy I've seen,'" he recalled. He told his team at the clinic about the incident and they loved it. "That just went everywhere through the clinic," Spinks said with a chuckle. "So now when I come walking in, they all say, 'here comes skinny!'"

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**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)

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**Watch the Video!**

Check out the video, "Managing Type 2 Diabetes" at [www.visn8.va.gov/VISN8/news/publications.asp](http://www.visn8.va.gov/VISN8/news/publications.asp).

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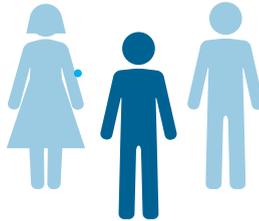
# Prevent Type 2 Diabetes

Prediabetes occurs when your blood sugar is higher than normal but not high enough to be type 2 diabetes. Think of prediabetes as a big warning sign for developing type 2 diabetes, as well as heart disease, and stroke. It's no surprise that many of the factors that increase your risk for type 2 diabetes also put you at risk for prediabetes.

**29**  
MILLION

About 29 million Americans have type 2 diabetes.

More than **1 OUT OF 3** adults have prediabetes.



**9 OUT OF 10**

do not know they have prediabetes

## RISK FACTORS FOR TYPE 2 DIABETES



Being Overweight or Obese



Family History & Age



Having Diabetes while Pregnant



Physically Active Fewer than 3 Times a Week

African Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, American Indians/Alaska Natives, Pacific Islanders, and some Asian Americans are at higher risk.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

To help **prevent** or **delay** type 2 diabetes you can:



**LOSE EXTRA WEIGHT**

Focus on taking small steps. Don't try to change too many habits at once. Get support for your weight loss efforts from family and friends, or from others also trying to lose weight.



**EAT HEALTHY**

Choose balanced meals and snacks that focus on vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean proteins, beans, low fat dairy, and small amounts of nuts, seeds, and olive or canola oil.



**BE MORE ACTIVE**

Aim for 150 minutes of physical activity a week spread over several days. Add more activity to your day. Reduce the amount of time sitting by stretching or walking around every hour.

## DID YOU KNOW?

You can cut your risk of developing type 2 diabetes in half (or more if over 60) if you:

- Get at least 150 minutes of physical activity a week
- Lose 7-10% of weight (if overweight)

## Talk with your VA Patient-Aligned Care Team (PACT) about getting screened.

Take the diabetes risk test: [www.cdc.gov/diabetes/takethetest](http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/takethetest)

Learn how VA's MOVE!® Program ([www.move.va.gov](http://www.move.va.gov)) and other Whole Health programs can help you lower your risk.

Your current weight (pounds)	Pounds to lose 7% of your weight
200	14
250	18
300	21
350	25

# Connect with Your VA Care Team Anywhere

Want to save time, travel, and money? If so, ask your provider about VA Video Connect, which links Veterans with their health care team from anywhere, using encryption for a secure and private session. VA Video Connect can make VA health care more convenient and reduce travel times for Veterans, especially those in very rural areas with limited access to VA health care facilities.



VA Video Connect works on nearly any device that has an internet connection and a web camera, including Windows-based PCs and laptops, Windows mobile devices, iOS mobile devices, and Android mobile devices. Learn more at [mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect](http://mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect).



Veterans and their health care providers jointly decide whether to use VA Video Connect. Before your scheduled VA Video Connect appointment, you will receive an email or calendar invite with a link to launch the session.

*Recipe provided by the Miami VA Healthcare System*

## Healthy Avocado Toast

This recipe is fast and easy to make. It fits into eating plans for managing diabetes, heart disease, and weight management.

### Ingredients

- 1 Hass avocado peeled and seeded
- 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro
- ½ fresh lime (for juice)
- ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- One dash of salt
- Black pepper (to taste)
- 2 slices of whole grain bread



### Directions

1. Toast two slices of whole grain bread in toaster until golden and crispy.
2. In a small bowl, combine and mash the remaining ingredients. Spread half of the mixture on each slice of toast.

**Nutritional information:** Serves 2. Per serving: 219 calories, 13 g total fat, 2 g saturated fat, 27 g carbohydrates, 9 g dietary fiber, 7 g protein, and 205 mg sodium.

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Help your VA 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.

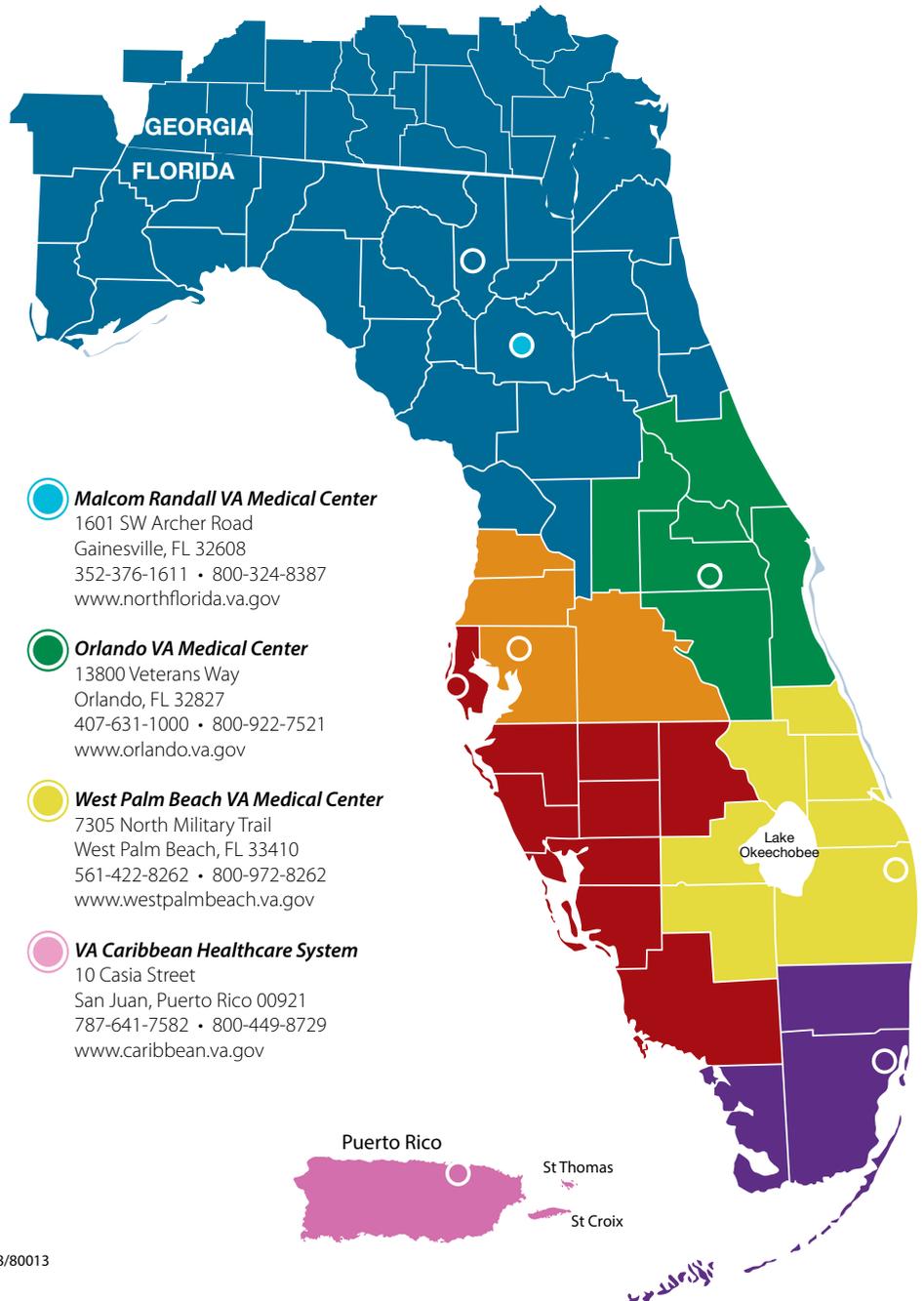
# VA Sunshine Healthcare Network

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Find a VA hospital or clinic near you:  
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