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

# VETERANS Health MATTERS

WINTER 2021

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

Air Force Veteran, David Wright receives breathing treatment from Respiratory Therapist, Susan Brennan at the Malcom Randall VA Medical Center in Gainesville, Fla.



Your Lung Health –  
Breathing for Life

Managing Stress with  
VA Whole Health

Breathing for Stress Relief



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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:

Managing Editor *Veterans Health Matters*  
VISN 8 Office of Communication  
140 Fountain Parkway, Suite 600  
St. Petersburg, Florida 33716

e-mail: [visn8communicationoffice@va.gov](mailto:visn8communicationoffice@va.gov)  
Visit VISN 8 on the web: [www.visn8.va.gov](http://www.visn8.va.gov)

# To Our Readers



Our lungs are for life. These two amazing organs supply us with the oxygen our bodies need to survive, around the clock. Lung function may begin to decline gradually with age. It is important to take actions to protect lung health – at any age. And be sure to watch for early warning signs of lung disease. Learn more on pages four and five.

Too much stress can have a huge impact on our health and wellbeing. With VA's Whole Health approach, you can explore a variety of strategies for relieving stress to find what works for you, as described on page three. One stress-relieving strategy that has helped many Veterans is using simple breathing techniques. Learn how to do some breathing exercises using these techniques on page six.

Once you have read the stories, test your word search skills with the puzzle on page seven. On the same page, check out the healthy dessert recipe to enjoy this winter.

Be well and stay safe!

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



## Stay Quit with the Stay Quit App!

Stay Quit Coach is a mobile app created to help Veterans quit smoking. It is designed to be a source of readily available support and information for adults who are already in treatment to quit smoking. Plus, using this app can help you to stay quit even after treatment ends.

This app guides you to create a tailored plan that takes into account your personal reasons for quitting. It provides information about smoking and quitting, as well as interactive tools to help cope with urges to smoke. There are also motivational messages and support contacts to help you stay smoke-free. To learn more about Stay Quit Coach, visit [mobile.va.gov/app/stay-quit-coach](http://mobile.va.gov/app/stay-quit-coach).

# Managing Stress

## *with VA Whole Health*



By Dawn Lewellyn, Recreation Therapist, Bay Pines VA Healthcare System

Stress can have a huge impact on your health. Having high stress levels is linked to heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, and anxiety. If left untreated, stress can negatively impact the body and its ability to function efficiently.

According to The American Institute of Stress:

- 77% of people experience stress that affects their physical health
- 73% of people have stress that impacts their mental health
- 48% of people have trouble sleeping because of stress

VA Whole Health is about balance in the many different parts of a person's life. Relieving stress may be accomplished in several ways, depending on your interests and goals. If you can identify your stressors, you can find a counterbalance. Creating coping mechanisms, such as movement or meditation, can decrease stress and improve your Whole Health.



Mr. Joe Kim demonstrates Tai Chi for Veterans at the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center in Bay Pines, Fla.

Most Whole Health programs may be accomplished from the comfort of your home with virtual interaction. This means no added stress of getting somewhere, dealing with traffic, or finding parking. It is stress reduction in its simplest form.

### ***Whole Health provides many opportunities for you to get life back on track and manage stress using one or more strategies.***

These strategies may include Whole Health coaching, education, iRest Integrated Restoration, yoga, Tai Chi, meditation, movement, recreation therapy, art therapy, and more. Tai Chi is popular at all VISN 8 facilities. It is considered a moving meditation and has been medically proven to lower blood pressure.

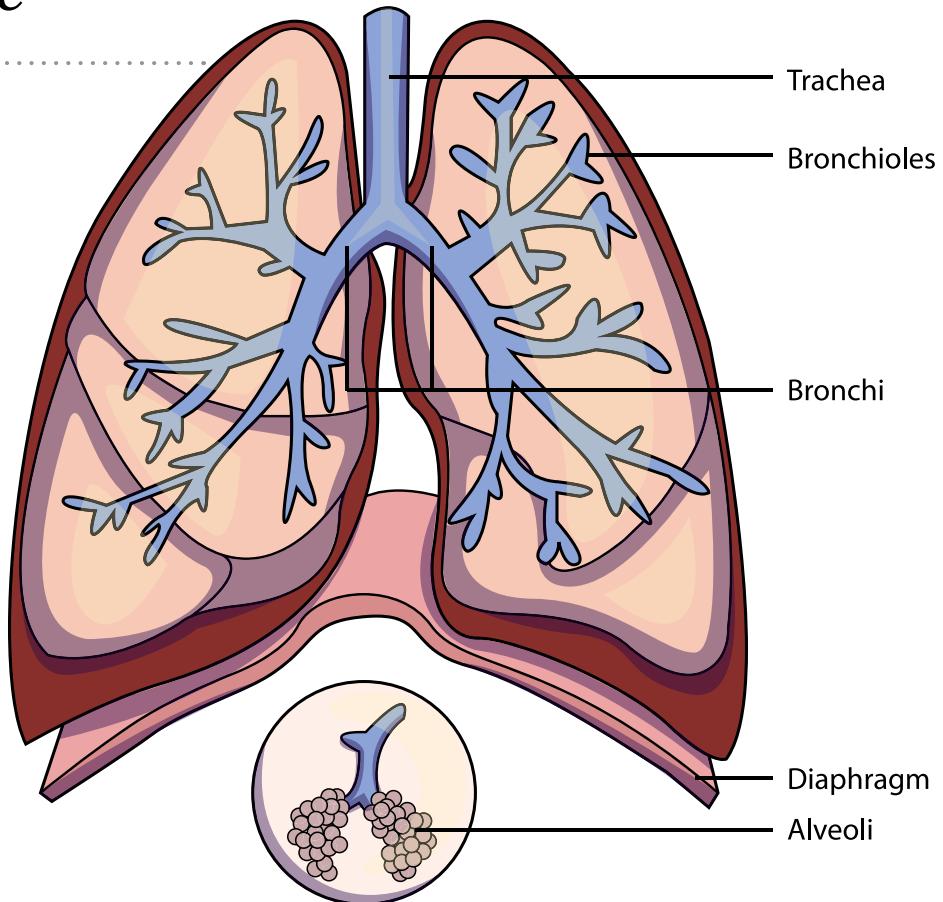
If you are interested in improving your Whole Health and finding ways to relieve stress, contact your health care team or Whole Health Department at your facility. Whole Health staff look forward to being a part of your team.

# Your Lung Health

## Breathing for Life

Your lungs are amazing, allowing you to breathe about 20,000 times a day, around the clock.

When you breathe in, air travels down into the alveoli (air sacs) in your lungs. This is where oxygen from the air moves to your blood and travels to all parts of your body. As this happens, carbon dioxide moves from your blood to your lungs. When you breathe out, the carbon dioxide leaves your body.



### Protecting Lung Health

Your body has natural defenses to protect your lungs from germs and other harmful substances. In addition, here are things you can do to keep your lungs healthy for life and reduce your risk of lung disease:

- **Quit smoking or don't smoke.**

If you smoke, it's never too late for your lungs to benefit from quitting. When you are ready, ask your VA provider about resources available to help you quit. Avoid secondhand smoke. Make your home and car smoke-free.

- **Avoid exposure to pollutants.** Test your home for radon gas and ensure it is well ventilated. Use protective gear if you work around dust, chemicals, fumes, or other pollutants. Avoid outdoor exercise on bad air days.

- **Protect yourself from infections.** Get a flu shot every year. Ask about a vaccine to protect against pneumonia if you are 65 or older. If you haven't already, get a COVID-19 vaccine. This is your best protection against severe lung-related illness if you are infected with COVID-19.

- **Aim for a healthy weight.** Lose excess weight to maintain proper lung function and reduce risk for airway diseases.

- **Exercise.** Be physically active to strengthen your lungs and heart so they work most efficiently.

- **Get regular checkups.** See your provider for regular checkups. Getting recommended health screenings help prevent lung diseases. In fact, early detection could save your life.

## Early Signs of Lung Disease

It is normal for lung function to decline gradually after age 35. For example, lung tissue may lose some elasticity, causing airways to get a little smaller. But it is still important to pay attention to changes in your breathing, such as a nagging cough and other signs.

Knowing the early warning signs of lung disease may help you receive treatment before the disease becomes more serious. Contact your provider if you have any of the following warning signs:

- **Chronic cough** – Lasts two months or longer
- **Shortness of breath** – Difficulty breathing that does not go away after exercising, or occurs with little or no effort
- **Chronic mucus production** – Lasts one month or longer
- **Wheezing** – Breathing that makes a noise
- **Coughing up blood** – Even small amounts may signal the presence of a lung infection
- **Chronic chest pain** – Lasts one month or longer, especially if it gets worse when you breathe in or when you cough

Based on your symptoms and medical exam, your provider may recommend lung tests to measure your lung function, lung volume, and blood gases to help diagnose the problem.

## Types of Lung Disease

Some lung diseases affect the airways or tubes that carry oxygen and other gases into and out of the lungs. This often causes a narrowing or blockage, making it feel like breathing through a straw. Examples include asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Another type affects the lung tissue, such as pulmonary fibrosis. Scarring or inflammation prevents the lungs from expanding fully, which can feel like wearing a too-tight vest.

Other lung diseases damage blood vessels in the lungs. One example is pulmonary hypertension, which is high blood pressure in the blood vessels leading from the heart to the lungs. This can cause shortness of breath, especially when a person exerts themselves.

Some of the most common lung diseases include the following:

- **COPD** – This occurs when airways in the lungs become inflamed and thicken. Less oxygen gets into the body's tissues, making it harder to get rid of carbon dioxide. COPD includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis. Symptoms include chronic cough and shortness of breath. The main cause of COPD is smoking, but nonsmokers can get COPD, too. Other risk factors include air pollution and working with chemicals, dust, and fumes. There is no cure, but COPD can be managed with medicines and breathing therapies.

• **Pneumonia** – This lung infection is caused by bacteria, viruses, or fungi. Symptoms vary from mild to severe. These include a cough, which may include greenish or bloody mucus, fever, and shortness of breath. Most healthy people recover in one to three weeks with treatment, but pneumonia can be life threatening, too.

• **Lung Cancer** – Cancer forms in the tissues of the lung. Smoking is the leading cause of lung cancer. Other causes include secondhand smoke, family history, air pollution, and exposure to certain chemicals, radiation, and radon gas. Early lung cancer may not cause symptoms. VA recommends lung cancer screening for some Veterans ages 50 – 80 years. Treatment may include surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy, depending on the type and how advanced it is. If lung cancer is found at an earlier stage, it is more likely to be treated successfully.



To learn more about your lung health, talk to your provider and visit [veteranshealthlibrary.va.gov/DiseasesConditions/Lung](https://veteranshealthlibrary.va.gov/DiseasesConditions/Lung).

### Watch the Video!

Check out the video, "Your Lung Health – Breathing For Life" at [visn8.va.gov/visn8/news/publications.asp](http://visn8.va.gov/visn8/news/publications.asp).



# Breathing for Stress Relief

Breathing is something your body does naturally every day to survive. But did you know that breathing is also a tool you can use to help relieve stress and stay calm?

By making a few simple tweaks to change your breathing, you can release more “feel-good” hormones and slow down your heart rate. You can also supply more oxygen to your blood. This makes every system in your body work better. Breathing for stress relief is about slowing down your breathing, taking deeper breaths, and controlling your exhales.

There are many simple breathing techniques you can use at any time. These may be helpful when you feel stressed out talking to someone, stuck in traffic, or any time you would like to take a few minutes to relax. Breathing exercises can also be a part of your “wind down” activities before bedtime to help prepare your body and mind for sleep.



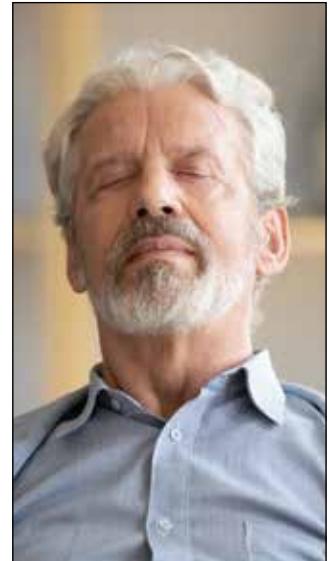
**Here are two simple breathing techniques that take just a few minutes to do:**

## Square Breathing

Breathing is typically done in two parts: 1. breathe in and 2. breathe out. Square breathing adds two more parts, as in four sides to a square: 1. breathe in, 2. hold your breath, 3. breathe out, and 4. hold your breath. You can do this to any count that is comfortable for you. For example, breathe in for two counts, hold for two counts, breathe out for two counts, and hold for two counts. Repeat this breathing cycle for a few more minutes.

## Ocean Breathing

This technique is like breathing with the waves. Picture yourself standing on a beach by the ocean. Imagine that you have your bare feet in the sand while you watch the waves. Next, match your breathing to the rhythm of the waves – breathe in as the waves come in and breathe out as the waves go out. Repeat this breathing cycle for a few more minutes.



These breathing techniques can help you slow down and be more present in your day. You can use them any time and any place to help take care of yourself. If you feel like you need more help with stress relief, talk with your provider about the many VA resources available to help manage stress.

# Word Search

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

BREATHING

M	G	N	I	Z	E	E	H	W	P	A	
COPD	S	M	O	K	I	N	G	C	C	G	F
COPING	F	Q	D	C	I	L	V	R	O	N	S
COUGH	B	G	A	K	E	H	K	Q	U	I	T
LUNGS	W	Y	R	C	O	P	I	N	G	H	R
OXYGEN	B	B	G	I	N	S	Y	A	H	T	E
PNEUMONIA	E	T	P	S	V	L	G	U	M	A	S
QUIT	C	N	E	G	Y	X	O	D	F	E	S
RADON	O	K	R	N	I	Y	A	F	L	R	P
SMOKING	P	N	E	U	M	O	N	I	A	B	E
STRESS	D	R	V	L	Z	E	U	D	A	T	Y

WHEEZING

## Cranberry Apple Crisp

### INGREDIENTS

1/4 cup sugar  
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour  
1 teaspoon grated lemon peel  
4 cups unpeeled, sliced apple  
2 cups fresh or frozen cranberries  
3/4 cup rolled oats  
1/4 cup packed brown sugar  
1/4 cup whole wheat flour  
2 teaspoons cinnamon  
3 tablespoons melted soft margarine



### DIRECTIONS

#### Filling:

1. Combine sugar, all-purpose flour, and lemon peel in a medium bowl. Mix well.
2. Stir in apples and cranberries. Spoon into a 6-cup baking dish.

#### Topping:

1. Combine oats, brown sugar, whole wheat flour, and cinnamon in a small bowl.
2. Stir in melted margarine. Spread topping over filling.
3. Bake at 375 degrees for 40 minutes or until filling is bubbly and top is brown.

#### Nutritional information:

(6 servings). Per serving: 259 calories, 7 g total fat, 1 g saturated fat, 48 g carbohydrates, 6 g dietary fiber, 3 g protein, and 58 mg sodium.



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VISN 8 Office of Communication  
140 Fountain Parkway, Ste 600  
St. Petersburg, FL 33716



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# VA Sunshine Healthcare Network

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