Veterans' Health

The Wellness Magazine for Ohio Veterans

2014

Personalized health planning

Get heart healthy!

Preventing falls

VA Healthcare System of Ohio

To our readers

Spring has sprung! As the weather starts warming up, I hope you'll take some time to get outside and enjoy it. You can do many outdoor activities that are good for your health.

In this issue, we focus on ways you can improve your health and prevent health problems, from improving heart health and cholesterol levels to personalized health planning and fall prevention tactics. Always keep in mind that many of the risk factors for disease are within your power to change. And improving your health can start with a few simple steps.

The VA is here to help. Throughout the issue, you'll find information about the many services the VA offers our Veterans, all designed to help you take those steps toward improved health.

Wishing you and your family a happy, healthy spring.

— **Jack Hetrick, Network Director**

About our mailing list

We make every effort to ensure our mailing list is accurate. If you have questions or would like to be added to or deleted from the list, let us know. Please include your entire address. To make a change, you *must* mail the mailing panel to:

Veterans' Health
VA Healthcare System of Ohio Network Office
11500 Northlake Drive
Suite 200
Cincinnati, OH 45249

National Healthcare Decisions Day

On April 16, join others across the country to talk about your future health care decisions. Complete your own advance directive. All adults can benefit from thinking about what their health care choices would be if they cannot speak for themselves. These decisions can be written down in an advance directive. That way, you can be sure that others know what they are.

Advance directives come in 2 main forms:

- A health care power of attorney documents the person you select to be your voice for your health care decisions if you cannot speak for yourself.
- A living will documents what kinds of medical treatments you would or would not want at the end of life.

To find out more, go to **www.nhdd.org.** You can also ask your VA health care team or a social worker at your local VA for more information.

Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 21 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your health care and learn about the many health services available through VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide Veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

***Veterans' Health* Editorial Board**

Kristen Fortner-Anderson
Dayton VAMC

Debbie Page
Terri Ruggerie
VA Healthcare System of Ohio

Joyce Seltzer
Cincinnati VAMC

Personalized health planning

Veterans are asked to develop a personal plan for their health and well-being. The plan starts with you deciding what is most important to you:

- working your body (energy, movement and flexibility)
- recharging your body (rest and sleep)
- food and drink (nourishment and fuel)
- personal development (personal life and work life)
- relationships and communication
- spirit and soul (purpose, growing, connecting)
- healthy environment (physical and emotional)
- health promotion

Once you know what you want, then you're ready to decide how to achieve it. This often means making a change in your habits, and setting a goal.

How to set goals

It takes three weeks to make a new habit. The trick to goal setting is to make small changes that you can commit to doing:

- **Decide what YOU want to achieve.** Focus on what you want to do, not what someone else wants you to do.
- **Decide what you will do to achieve your goal.** Make it action-specific. An example is, "I will drink water instead of a soft drink with my lunch."
- **Then, answer these questions:**
  - How much, or how little time, distance or amount? Example: "I will walk for 30 minutes at a time."
  - When and how often? Include times of day and the days or number of days each week. Example: "I will walk after dinner five days a week."
  - On a scale of 0 to 10, how confident are you that you can do this? If you give yourself less than a 7 out of 10 chance, rethink your plan. Make it something you are confident you will do. Example: "With an 8 out of 10 chance, I will walk after dinner on Monday, Wednesday and Friday."

Still not sure where to start? Think about the VA's nine healthy living messages:

1. Be involved in your health care. Know your numbers. Ask your health care provider questions.
2. Be tobacco-free. If you smoke, quitting is the single most important thing you can do to improve your health.
3. Eat wisely. Start eating more fruits and vegetables; cut out fried foods.
4. Be physically active. Aim for at least 2.5 hours of exercise per week. Remember, every 10 minutes counts.
5. Strive for a healthy weight. A reasonable and safe weight loss is 1 to 2 pounds a week.
6. Limit alcohol. Men should drink no more than two drinks a day. Men over the age of 65 and women should drink no more than one drink a day.
7. Get recommended screening tests and immunizations.
8. Manage stress. Do things you enjoy and learn to better manage your time.
9. Be safe. Remove and/or fix hazards in your home.

The road to good health begins with you! **VH**

Images on any of these pages may be from one or more of these photo sources: © 2014 Thinkstock and © 2014 iStockphoto.com.

Heart disease: How to prevent it

Heart disease affects the heart and the arteries within the heart. It's the leading cause of death in both men and women in the United States, killing 1 in every 4 people each year.

Coronary artery disease (CAD) is the most common type of heart disease. CAD occurs when the arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle become hardened or narrowed. This buildup occurs as a result of plaque from cholesterol and fat forming on the inner walls of the arteries.

Gender differences

Some differences exist between men and women. Half of the men who die suddenly from a heart attack had no previous symptoms. Erectile dysfunction (ED) in men can be an early warning sign of heart disease. The arteries that supply blood to the penis are often affected before those to the heart; as many as two-thirds of men with a heart attack also report ED. Women become more vulnerable to heart disease after menopause. After age 55, women have higher low-density lipoprotein cholesterol levels than men; this increases the risk of heart disease. Women are more likely to have high blood pressure after menopause. High blood pressure is a risk factor for heart disease.

Heart attack symptoms: Take action!

Call 911 if you think you might be having a heart attack. Do not wait to see if you will feel better. After calling 911, chew one adult aspirin. Never drive yourself to the hospital!

Risk factors you can control

Some risk factors for heart disease, like age or family history, are beyond your control. But you can take steps to improve other major risk factors, such as:

• **Not smoking.** If you smoke or use other tobacco products, stop. In addition, avoid exposure to secondhand smoke. The VA offers programs and medicine to help you quit. Talk to your health care team about what will work for you.

• **Eating a healthy diet and maintaining a healthy weight.** Choose vegetables, fruits, whole grains, high-fiber foods and lean sources of protein, such as fish. Limit foods high in fat and sodium. Maintain a waist size that is less than 40 inches. Ask about the VA's *MOVE!*® weight-loss program.

• **Being active.** Include physical activity in your daily routine. Some activity is better than none. Do things that you enjoy and set reasonable goals. Doing it with a friend can help improve your success.

• **Limiting alcohol.** Because consuming too much alcohol can cause high blood pressure, drink alcohol in moderation. That means no more than two drinks a day for men or one drink a day for women.

• **Managing stress.** Too much stress over a long period of time can put your health at risk. If you have problems with stress, talk with your health care team.

• **Managing your chronic conditions.** If you have high cholesterol, take steps to lower it with your diet or taking medicine as prescribed. If you have diabetes, keep your blood sugar levels within normal limits. And, if you have high blood pressure, take your medicine as prescribed and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

• **Knowing (and acting upon) symptoms of a heart attack.** Heart attacks, almost half of which are fatal, happen to about 1 million Americans each year. Heart attack symptoms vary widely and may come on slowly. Many lives could be saved if people knew the warning signs of a heart attack and called 911 right away. Some warning signs include:

• chest pain or discomfort that may feel like pressure, fullness, or squeezing lasting more than a minute or two

• pain or discomfort in the upper back, upper belly, neck, jaw or arms; often this pain comes and goes, and so it's usually ignored

• shortness of breath

• abdominal discomfort that may feel like indigestion (men older than 60 are more likely to experience this symptom)

• flu-like symptoms (clammy, sweaty skin, lightheadedness, fatigue and weakness)

• nausea or vomiting

• a fast or uneven heartbeat

The symptoms of a heart attack usually last longer than five minutes and do not go away with rest. Some people, particularly those with diabetes, can have silent heart attacks with no symptoms at all. **VH**

Healthy U success story

Charlie and Donna Hughes attended one of the first Healthy U classes two years ago. Charlie has heart failure, and two years ago, his bedroom was in their first-floor dining room. This is where he spent most of his time. By setting small goals each week, he has had much success. Some of his goals were walking, using the stairs, keeping a log to record what he eats and reading ingredient labels. He started with one small goal at a time.

Today, Charlie has lost 50 pounds. His bedroom is back on the second floor, and he goes up and down the steps many times a day. Charlie now enjoys teaching others about Healthy U at the Cincinnati VA along with his wife, Donna.

Healthy U is a program for people with chronic health problems. Have your own success story—ask about Healthy U groups at your local VA.

Cholesterol and heart disease

The basics

Cholesterol is a waxy substance in your blood. In most people, the liver produces about 80 percent of the cholesterol that their bodies need. Some cholesterol is needed for you to stay healthy. Additional cholesterol comes from the foods you eat. This extra cholesterol is not needed for your body to function properly and may instead cause health problems.

What happens if you have too much cholesterol in your body?

The excess cholesterol builds up on the inside walls of your arteries. A shell of scar tissue, called plaque, forms and narrows the inside of your arteries. If too much plaque forms in your arteries, your risk for heart disease, heart attack and stroke increases.

Your body makes different kinds of cholesterol:

- **Total cholesterol** is the amount of all cholesterol in your blood. The higher the number, the more likely it is that your cholesterol is putting you at risk.
- **LDL (low-density lipoprotein)** is "bad" cholesterol. It breaks apart as it moves through your bloodstream and deposits particles on the walls of arteries. Your body turns these particles into plaque. High levels of LDL cholesterol increase your risk for heart disease.
- **HDL (high-density lipoprotein)** is "good" cholesterol. HDL cholesterol does not break apart. As it moves through your bloodstream, it picks up and removes LDL cholesterol. High levels of HDL cholesterol are good for your health.
- **Triglycerides** are the chemical form of most fats in your body. In order to store the fats, your body converts fat to triglycerides. High triglyceride levels can increase your risk for heart disease.

The levels of each type in your body can be checked with a simple blood test.

Control your risk factors

Diet: No more than 20 to 35 percent of your diet should come from fat. Meat and dairy products contain fat. Choose lean cuts and low-fat products. Remove fat and skin, and do not fry your foods. Eating foods high in fiber or omega-3 fatty acids can help lower cholesterol levels. Compare food labels. Pick foods that are low in cholesterol and fat, with little saturated and no trans fats. Look for products with monounsaturated fats and polyunsaturated fats.

- **Monounsaturated fats may lower LDL (bad) cholesterol.** They are found in vegetable oils, like olive, canola, and peanut oils. They're also found in avocados and some nuts.
- **Polyunsaturated fats may lower total and LDL cholesterol.** They are found in vegetable oils, such as corn, safflower, and soybean oils. They're also found in some seeds, nuts, and fish.

There are many ways you can still enjoy your favorite foods. When eating out, ask for low-fat or heart-healthy options and for your food to be made with less fat. Order salad dressings on the side. When preparing foods at home:

- **Don't fry.** Instead steam, bake, broil, grill, or microwave your food.
- **Don't use** shortening, butter or margarine to prepare foods. Use a nonstick spray in your pans.
- **Remove skin** from chicken, turkey and fish, and trim fat from meats before cooking.
- **Replace shortening,** butter, or margarine with olive oil or canola oil.
- **Don't eat the yolk of eggs.** Replace each whole egg with two egg whites.
- **Use reduced-fat** salad dressings and mayonnaise.
- **Use skim milk** instead of whole milk.

Weight: Excess weight can increase total blood cholesterol, LDL and triglyceride levels as well as lower HDL. This can increase your risk for heart disease. Excess weight also makes your heart work harder. Work with your health care

team to set a personal weight loss goal.

Activity: Lower HDL and higher total cholesterol levels are linked to an inactive lifestyle. Exercise helps raise HDL (good) cholesterol, control weight, lower blood pressure and strengthen the heart muscle. Every 10 minutes counts. Aim for being active at least 2.5 hours a week.

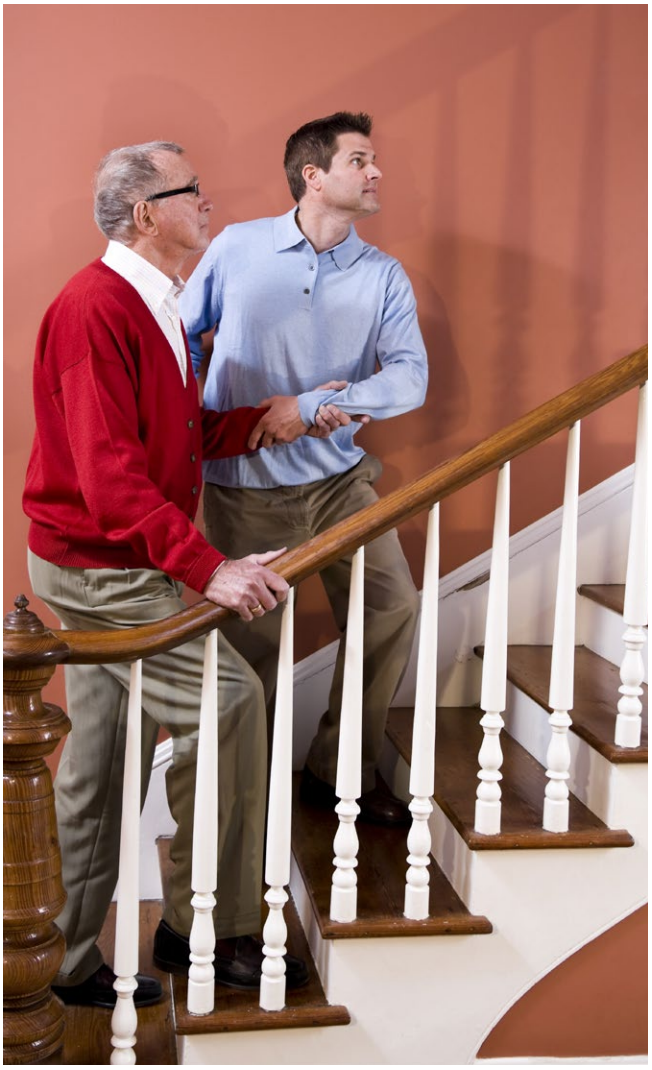
Smoking: Tobacco smoke can damage blood vessel walls, making it easier for cholesterol to deposit and plaque to form. HDL cholesterol levels are often lower in smokers. If you smoke, stop!

High blood pressure and diabetes: Both conditions are risk factors for high cholesterol and heart disease. Keep your high blood pressure and diabetes under control. Take medicine as prescribed. Manage your weight. Increase your activity. **VH**

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

	Men	Women
Total cholesterol	**High:** 240 mg/dL or higher **Borderline high:** 200–239 mg/dL **Desirable:** Less than 200 mg/dL	**High:** 240 mg/dL or higher **Borderline high:** 200–239 mg/dL **Desirable:** Less than 200 mg/dL
LDL cholesterol	**Very high:** 190 mg/dL or higher **High:** 160–189 mg/dL **Borderline high:** 130–159 mg/dL **Near optimal/above optimal:** 100–129 mg/dL **Optimal:** Less than 100 mg/dL	**Very high:** 190 mg/dL or higher **High:** 160–189 mg/dL **Borderline high:** 130–159 mg/dL **Near optimal/above optimal:** 100–129 mg/dL **Optimal:** Less than 100 mg/dL
HDL cholesterol	**High risk:** Less than 40 mg/dL **Desirable:** 40–49 mg/dL **Optimal:** 50 mg/dL or higher	**High risk:** Less than 50 mg/dL **Desirable:** 50–59 mg/dL **Optimal:** 60 mg/dL or higher
Triglyceride levels	**Very high:** 500 mg/dL or higher **High:** 200–499 mg/dL **Borderline high:** 150–199 mg/dL **Normal:** Less than 150 mg/dL	**Very high:** 500 mg/dL or higher **High:** 200–499 mg/dL **Borderline high:** 150–199 mg/dL **Normal:** Less than 150 mg/dL

Take action: Prevent falls



Have you ever worried about falling? Falls can seriously affect your life. They are the No. 1 cause of injury-related hospitalizations and deaths for people ages 65 and older. One in three seniors falls each year. However, less than half talk to their health care provider about it. Many develop a fear of falling again in the future, which may cause them to limit their activities. Limiting movement can lead to a loss of mobility and fitness, which actually further increases the risk of falling.

What you can do today

Falls are not a normal part of aging. Here's what you can do to prevent falls:

- **Start a regular exercise program.** Some

Take action for safety

- Remove things you can trip over (such as papers, books, clothes and shoes) from stairs and places where you walk.
- Install handrails and lights on all staircases.
- Remove small throw rugs or use double-sided tape to keep the rugs from slipping.
- Keep items you use often in cabinets you can reach easily without using a step stool.
- Put grab bars inside and next to the tub or shower as well as next to your toilet.
- Use non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors.
- Improve the lighting in your home. As you get older, you need brighter lights to see well.
- Wear shoes both inside and outside the house. Avoid going barefoot or wearing slippers.

Maintain your independence!

To learn more about fall prevention or to find "A Matter of Balance" class near you, visit the Steady U website at **http://aging.ohio.gov/steadyu.** Or, call your Area Agency on Aging at **1-866-243-5678.**

exercises, like tai chi, focus on improving leg strength and balance.

• **Get up slowly.** Stand still for a moment. Let any dizziness pass before you start to walk.

• **Ask your health care provider to review your medications.** Learn whether any of them can have interactions or cause side effects such as dizziness or drowsiness.

• **Keep your vision sharp so you can get around safely.** Have your eyes checked every year. Get new glasses, if needed, to make your vision as good as possible. Consider having a separate pair of glasses with single vision lenses for walking outside.

• **Make your home safer.** About half of falls happen at home. Take action in your home to reduce the risk of falls.

• **Reduce your risk of hip fracture.** Get screened for osteoporosis and consume an adequate amount of calcium and vitamin D from food and/or supplements. Engage in regular weight-bearing exercise to maintain bone strength.

• **Share your concerns.** Your VA health care team will be asking you about your risk of falls at your primary care visit. Be sure to talk about any concerns you may have.

Help from the VA

If you want to be proactive in preventing falls in your life, consider joining in "A Matter of Balance," a class sponsored by the Ohio Department of Aging. This award-winning program is designed to help you manage falls and increase activity levels. You learn to see and fix things in your life that may be increasing your risk of falling.

There are eight two-hour sessions designed to fit into your schedule. Each session consists of just eight to 10 people, giving everyone a chance to contribute and benefit. Activities include group discussion, problem solving, skill building, assertiveness training, videos, sharing of practical solutions and exercise training. Workshop leaders are not health professionals, but rather civilians who have made a commitment to stay fall-free. They have been specially trained to help others maintain healthy, active lifestyles free from falls. Six months after the workshop, participants reported more control over factors that could cause them to fall, increased exercise and activity levels and fewer falls. They felt more comfortable talking about their fear of falling and planned to continue exercising. Ninety-eight percent of participants would recommend "A Matter of Balance" to their friends and loved ones. **VH**

Fast fall facts

• 20–30% of people who fall suffer injuries such as lacerations, hip fracture or head trauma, which can make it hard to get around or live independently. Falls can also increase the risk of early death.

• More than 95% of hip fractures are caused by falls.

• Rates of fall-related fractures are twice as great for women as for men.

• People ages 75 and older who fall are four to five times more likely than those ages 65–74 to be admitted to a long-term care facility for a year or longer.

• Men are more likely than women to die from a fall.

• The death rates from falls among older men and women have risen sharply over the past decade.

Alzheimer's disease

What you need to know

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive disease of the brain. It damages the part of the brain involved in memory, problem solving, judgment, language and behavior. Often the earliest signs include memory problems. But as the disease progresses, almost all areas of thinking are affected. Eventually, a person with the disease isn't able to carry out simple tasks in his or her daily life.

Alzheimer's and dementia

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia in older adults. Even though most symptoms appear after age 65 for most people with this type of dementia, it's believed that damage to the brain starts 10 years before any symptoms occur. Experts estimate that 5.4 million people have this disease. Of these, 200,000 are under age 65. More women than men have Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, perhaps because women live longer than men and because increasing age is the greatest risk factor for this disease. Alzheimer's disease is the sixth-leading cause of death in the United States.

Causes, warning signs and risk factors

The exact cause of Alzheimer's disease is unknown. Three brain changes occur with this disease: plaques, tangles and loss of connection between nerve cells in the brain. As plaques and tangles form in the brain, nerve cells are damaged. The nerve cells lose the ability to function and communicate with each other, and over time, they die. As more nerve cells die, the brain tissues shrink and symptoms become more obvious.

Alzheimer's disease affects people differently. According to the Alzheimer's Association, early warning signs include:

- memory loss that disrupts daily life
- challenges in planning or solving problems
- problems with completing familiar tasks
- confusion with time and place
- trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships
- new problems with words in speaking or writing
- misplacement of things and the loss of the ability to retrace steps
- decreased or poor judgment
- withdrawal from work or social activities
- changes in mood and personality

There are three stages: mild/early stage, moderate/mid-stage, and advanced/late stage. People progress through these stages at different rates. There is a greater loss of cognitive and functional abilities as a person advances through the stages. When the disease is advanced, people need help with bathing, dressing, eating and using the bathroom. In the final stages, people can't communicate, don't recognize loved ones, become bed-bound and need constant care. More than 15 million Americans provide unpaid care for someone with Alzheimer's disease.

The greatest risk factor for Alzheimer's disease is advancing age. But, Alzheimer's is not a normal part of aging. Also, people younger than age 65 can also develop this disease. When this occurs, it is called "early-onset" Alzheimer's disease, and there is often a strong family history of the disease. Besides age, other risk factors include people with:

- a family history of the disease
- inherited APOE-e4 gene

• mild cognitive impairment
• heart disease and risk factors for heart disease (diabetes, high cholesterol, smoking, overweight)
• repetitive traumatic brain injury (TBI) and/or a more serious TBI

Managing the disease

In some cases, people can function well for a long time without help. You can take steps to better manage this disease and have a better quality of life:

1. Stay active and healthy. Spend time with friends and family. Eat healthy foods, exercise every day and get enough rest.

2. Look for ways to adapt. Change tasks to fit your needs. Plan to take longer to complete a task. Try to have a set routine. Use labels, lists and sticky notes for reminders. Keep track of activities on a calendar. Ask for help.

3. Be safe. If you go out, let someone know where you are going and when you will be back. Make your home safer with proper lighting and reduce your risk for falls. If you drive, ask others if you are able to do this safely.

4. Ask about medicines and take them as prescribed. Medicine may slow memory loss for some people. Others may need medicine to help with sleep or depression. Tell your doctor what problems you have so they can be treated appropriately.

5. Plan for the future. Make sure your legal and financial affairs are in order. Write a living will and name a durable power of attorney who can make decisions if you're not able to. **VH**

Ohio Veterans

Your military service may be worth more than you think. Most discharged Veterans have earned benefits! Your benefits could include:

• health care
• help with your education
• a loan for a new home
• a special Ohio Veterans Bonus if you served in the Persian Gulf War or after Oct. 7, 2001
• eligibility to live in an Ohio Veterans Home (for disabled wartime Veterans)

Get started right away. Contact the County Veterans Service Network at **1-877-OHIO VET (1-877-644-6838)** or find your county on the map at **http://dvs.ohio.gov.**

VA Healthcare System of Ohio Network Office
11500 Northlake Drive, Suite 200
Cincinnati, OH 45249

PRSRT STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
Lebanon Junction, KY
Permit No. 19

Printed With Soy Ink
Please Recycle This Publication

Copyright © 2014 VA Healthcare System of Ohio

Get healthy

We can help

Healthy living goals and smartphone apps

Smartphone apps can't make you lose weight, eat healthily, stop smoking or exercise. But they sure can help. And there are hundreds of health and wellness apps from which to choose.

No matter what healthy living goal you're focusing on, there's most likely an app that can help you stay on track. There are even apps to remind you to take your medicine. VA mobile health apps expand health care beyond the traditional office visit:

Stay Quit Coach is a mobile app designed to help with quitting smoking. It can be used as a supplement to a smoking cessation program or after treatment. The app guides users in creating a tailored plan that takes into account their personal reasons for quitting. You can:

- use interactive tools and activities for coping with urges to smoke
- identify reasons for smoking that are often overlooked, such as coping with symptoms of PTSD
- access contacts or hotlines for preventing relapse

CBT-i Coach is a mobile app designed for use by Veterans who are having difficulty sleeping and are engaged with cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia. You can:

- learn to recognize how thoughts and sleep-related behaviors affect sleep patterns
- enhance sleep quality and duration
- learn how to adjust both sleep routines and your approach to sleep

VA mobile apps are available for iPhone, iPad and iPod touch at the Apple App Store.

New to My HealtheVet: Send a secure message attachment!

It's now easier than ever to share information online with your health care provider. A My HealtheVet user with a Premium account* can send an attachment to his or her VA health care team through secure messaging.

The attached file will display in the "attach file" section of the secure message header. Type the body of the message and send it with the attachment. The message with the attachment can be viewed in the sent folder.

At this time only one file can be attached per secure message sent. The maximum file size of an attachment is 3 megabytes (MB). Only these file formats can currently be uploaded: .txt, .pdf, .jpg, .doc, .gif and .png.

**My HealtheVet users require identity authentication for a Premium account. Stop by Primary Care check-in at a VA facility or the My HealtheVet office. Then log on to your account and opt in to use secure messaging.*

The American Veteran

Reality TV – VA Style

View compelling stories of real life Veterans. Features offer information about VA benefits and services. The series honors heroism and sacrifice of service members past and present. Moments in history are shared with those who lived it. Visit **www.va.gov/opa/feature/amervet.**