



Great Lakes VA HEALTHVIEWS

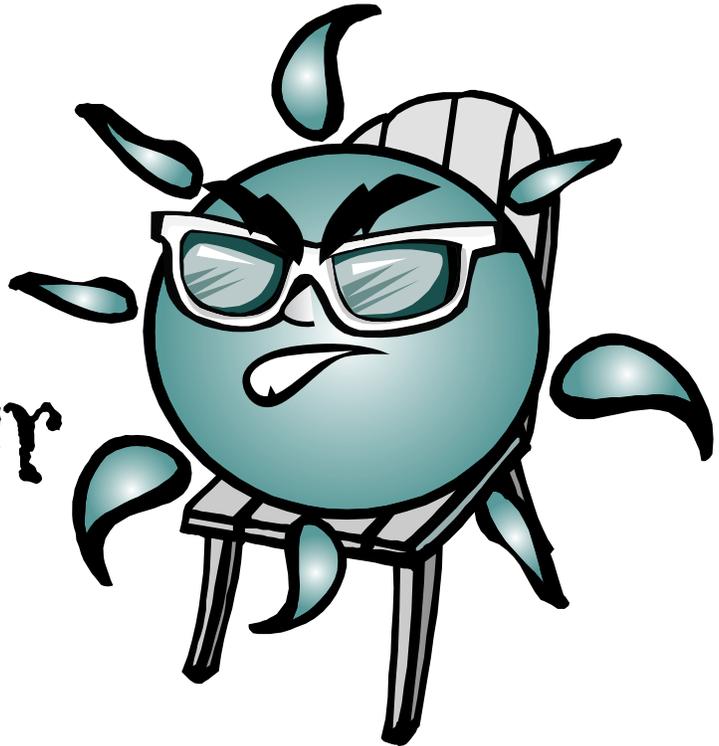
The Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12



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The SUN and Skin Cancer



Spending time in the sun can do damage to your skin in many ways. Your skin may age prematurely, develop wrinkles, lose elasticity, or develop dark patches. You can also develop precancerous skin changes.

Skin cancer is one of the most common types of cancer. Most skin cancers are caused by exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays. There are two types of skin cancers, melanomas and non-melanomas. Non-melanomas include basal cell skin cancer and squamous cell skin cancer. Usually they do not spread. If found and treated early, they are easily cured. Melanomas develop from the cells that give

our skin its color. Melanomas are less common, but more dangerous, and can spread to other parts of the body. Generally, melanomas are curable if found and treated in their early stages.

It is important to remember that exposure to the sun can increase your risk for skin cancer, even if you are not sunburned. It's hard to avoid sunlight, but there are things you can do to protect your skin from the sun's harmful rays.

(continued on page 2)

1. Limit the amount of direct sun exposure during the middle of the day (10am – 4pm) when the sun’s rays are strongest.

- Go in the shade whenever possible.

2. Cover-up – Wear clothing to protect your skin, for example long sleeves and long pants.

- Dark colors protect more than light colors.
- Tightly woven fabrics protect more than loosely woven fabrics.
- Dry fabric protects more than wet fabric.
- Wear a hat – Ideally, wear a hat that has a wide brim; at least 2 to 3 inches all the way around. It will protect your neck, ears, eyes, forehead, nose and scalp.

3. Wear sunscreen – Use a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher.

- Apply a generous amount on all skin that is exposed to the sun.
- Apply 20 to 30 minutes before going outdoors.
- Reapply every 2 hours.
- Reapply after swimming.
- Reapply if you are sweating.
- Use lip balm that contains sunscreen.

- Remember to use sunscreen even if it is overcast or cloudy.
- Cosmetics do not protect you from the sun, unless they have sunscreen in them. Look for moisturizer, foundation and lipstick that have sunscreen.

4. Wear sunglasses – Wrap-around sunglasses offer the most protection.

- Sunglasses should have 99% to 100% absorption.
- Look for labels that state UVA/UVB blocking; UV absorption to 400nm; meets ANSI UV requirements.

Watch for changes in the size, color, shape or texture of any marks on your skin. You also need to pay attention to moles. If you notice a mole that is different looking, itches or bleeds, or any other changes in your skin, call your primary care provider. Most skin cancers are curable if detected and treated early.

Adapted from the Monthly Prevention Topic, “The Great CoverUp”: VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, 2006. www.nchpdp.med.va.gov

Submitted by:
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Mosquitoes, Ticks, and Bees

The warmer weather that brings us outdoors also brings some unwanted “guests.” Here are some helpful hints to protect against being bit or stung.

Mosquitoes and the West Nile Virus



We all know mosquito bites can make you itch. But an infected mosquito can also give you West Nile Virus. The West Nile Virus can be serious, especially for the elderly and someone with a weak immune system. It is more common in the summer and early fall.

How to protect yourself:

- Apply insect repellent to exposed skin. Use a repellent that contains DEET. Remember to read the product instructions before using.
- Wear long-sleeves, long pants and socks when spending time outdoors.
- Spray your clothing with an insect repellent that contains DEET.
- Mosquitoes are most active in the early morning and early

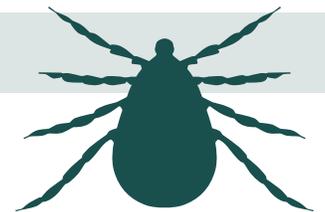
evening. Take extra care during these hours.

- Get rid of standing water. Discard flowerpots, buckets or other items that can hold water. Clean bird baths at least weekly.
- Screens on windows and doors should fit tightly. Repair screens if they have holes.
- Report dead birds to local authorities, such as the health department. Dead birds may be a sign that West Nile Virus exists in your neighborhood. Do not touch a dead bird with your bare hands.

Call your primary care provider if you develop flu-like symptoms, fever, skin rash and muscle weakness after a mosquito bite.

Tick Bites

Lyme Disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF) are common in the US. Both can be caused by a tick bite. The Black-Legged deer tick carries Lyme disease. It is the size of the head of a pin and usually lives on deer. The American dog tick and the Rocky Mountain wood tick spread RMSF.



To protect yourself from ticks:

- Take extra care in May, June and July. Ticks are most active during these months.
- Apply insect repellent to exposed

skin. Use a repellent that contains DEET. Remember to read the product instructions before using.

- ❁ Avoid wooded areas, high grass and areas with lots of leaf litter. Ticks are most often found in these areas.
- ❁ In wooded areas, wear long pants, long sleeves and socks. Tuck your pants into your socks and your shirts into your pants. This will keep ticks on the outside of your clothing.
- ❁ Stay in the middle of the trail to avoid contact with high grass,

bushes and leaf litter.

- ❁ Remove all outer clothing before coming indoors.
- ❁ Check all areas of your skin for the presence of ticks.
- ❁ If you find a tick, remove it using tweezers. Dispose of the tick in a plastic bag.
- ❁ Cleanse the area where the tick was with an antiseptic.

Call your primary care provider if you develop a fever, nausea, muscle aches, headache, loss of appetite or a rash after a tick bite.

Bee Stings



No one likes being stung by a bee, wasp or yellow jacket.

To prevent being stung:

- ❁ Don't wear light-colored clothing.
- ❁ Don't use scented soaps and perfumes.
- ❁ Don't leave food and drink uncovered or garbage out.

If you are stung:

- ❁ Scrape the stinger with a side-to-side motion using your fingernail or blunt object like a credit card. Once it is removed, wash the area with soap and

water. Do this several times a day until the skin heals.

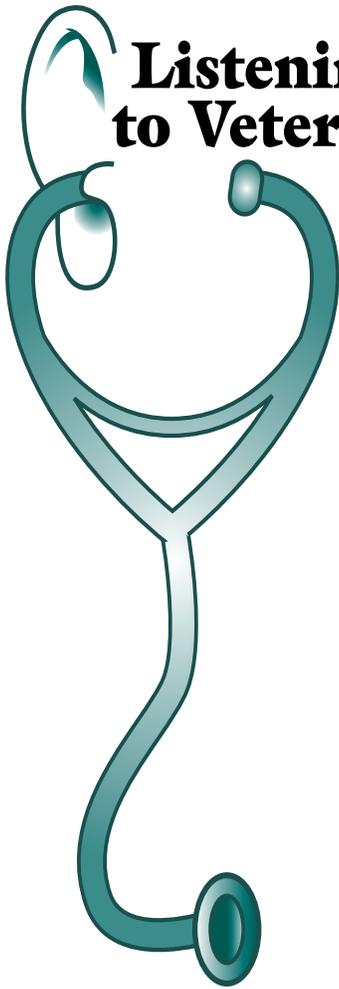
- ❁ Apply a cold compress to relieve pain. A paste made of baking soda and water, applied for 15-20 minutes, may help. Consider taking an over-the-counter pain medicine.

Get medical help if:

- ❁ You are stung on the nose or mouth.
- ❁ You have a large area of swelling, abnormal breathing, tightness in your throat or chest, dizziness, or hives.

Adapted from the Monthly Prevention Topic, "Mosquitoes, Ticks and Bees, Oh My!": VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, 2006. www.nchpdp.med.va.gov

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How Can I Cope with the Summer Heat?

During hot weather, you should drink plenty of fluids, even if you are not active. Avoid drinks containing alcohol because they will actually cause you to lose more fluid.

Wear as little clothing as possible when you are at home. Choose lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing. In the hot sun, a wide-brimmed hat will provide shade and keep your head cool.

If you go outdoors, be sure to apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going out and continue to reapply according to the package directions. Sunburn affects your body's ability to cool itself and causes a loss of body fluids. It also causes pain and damages the skin.

Electric fans may provide some comfort, but when the temperature is in the high 90s, fans will not prevent heat-related illness. A cool shower or bath or moving to an air-conditioned building is a much better way to cool off. Visit a shopping mall or public library for a few hours.

If you are working or exercising in a hot environment, pace yourself. Drink two to four glasses (16-32 ounces) of cool fluids each hour. If activity in the heat makes your heart pound and leaves you gasping for breath, STOP. Go to a cool area or find some shade and rest, especially if you are lightheaded, confused, weak, or faint.

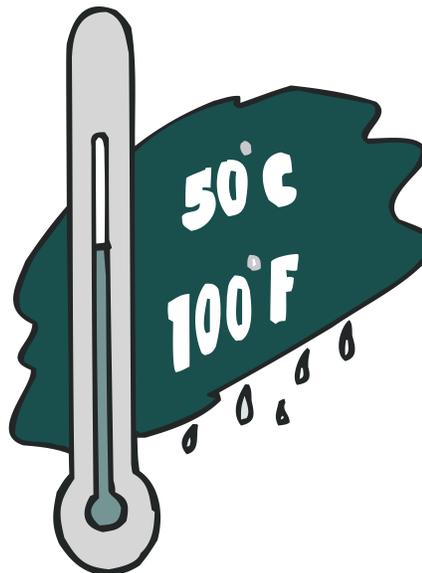
Answered by:
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You can develop heat exhaustion when the temperature is high and you are not drinking enough fluids. You are at more risk for heat exhaustion if you are:

- Elderly
- Have high blood pressure, especially if you take water pills or diuretics
- Work or exercise in a hot environment

Warning signs of heat exhaustion:

- Heavy sweating
- Paleness
- Muscle cramps
- Tiredness
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting



The skin may be cool and moist. Breathing will be fast and shallow. If heat exhaustion is untreated, it may progress to heat stroke. Seek medical attention if these signs worsen or last longer than one hour.

Remember . . .

- Drink plenty of fluid.
- Replace salts and minerals.
- Wear appropriate clothing and sunscreen.
- Pace yourself.
- Stay cool indoors.
- Plan outdoor activities carefully.
- Use a buddy system.
- Check on friends and family who are at high risk for heat exhaustion.



This information was adapted from the National Center for Environmental Health webpage: “Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) About Extreme Heat”. <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/faq.asp>. Last reviewed June 15, 2005.

Living with Alzheimer's and Other Dementias

If you have Alzheimer's or other types of dementia, your provider can recommend some medicines that may help. But there are also things you can do to help yourself:

1. Stay Busy

It helps to have daily activities that you enjoy. There are day programs where veterans get together to visit, have lunch together and go on trips. Many veterans like getting out of the house and having somewhere to go and something to do.

2. Get Help at Home

If you want to remain in your own home, but need a little help, tell your providers. You may be able to have an aide help you with personal care, cook your meals, or do light housekeeping.

3. Tell Others How You Feel and What You Need

You may feel restless or jumpy. You may be bothered by noise and feel it is harder to pay attention. This can be frustrating and confusing. Once your family and VA staff know how you feel, they can make changes that help you feel more at ease.

4. Always Carry Identification

Many older people notice changes in their memory. You may worry that you will get lost or forget your address or phone number. This may be hard to talk about, but it is a very common feeling. It may provide peace of mind to you and your family if you carry information, including your address and phone number, with you at all times. The VA staff can help you get the kind of I.D. that will work best for you.

Remember – help is available! Talk to your provider and contact the Alzheimer's Association at 1-800-272-3900 or on the Internet at www.alz.org.

Adapted from Alzheimer's Association webpage; 2006; www.alz.org

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Important note: We are not able to **mail** this newsletter to you. It can be found in waiting rooms of your VA Medical Center and outpatient clinics.

You can also subscribe to the electronic version of this newsletter by going to www.visn12.med.va.gov/subscribe.htm



Your best source for information about your health will always be your health care team. We hope this newsletter will encourage you to ask questions about your health concerns.

Phone Numbers for VISN 12 Hospitals

Hines: 708-202-8387
Iron Mountain: 906-774-3300
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Milwaukee: 1-888-469-6614
North Chicago: 1-800-393-0865
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**“Ask An Expert” Question
or Idea for Future Articles**

Do you have an “Ask An Expert” question or an idea for a future article? Your ideas can be e-mailed or mailed to the Senior Editor.

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If you have any concerns about patient care or safety in your facility, first contact the person in charge. If your concern cannot be resolved, the VA encourages you to contact JCAHO. You may request a “public information interview.” Requests can be made to:

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