



Great Lakes VA HEALTHVIEWS

The Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12



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Fact or Fiction?

Improvements are made every year in the way our health problems are treated. Yet many people cling to the “old wives tales” passed down for generations. The following statements are either fact or fiction. Read on to see if what you think you know is really true.

You don't need to wear sunscreen during the winter months.

Fiction

Even though the temperature is colder and the sun may not seem as bright, the rays that cause skin damage are present. Many people forget that snow can reflect the sun's rays. Wearing sunscreen and a wide brim hat can protect your skin no matter what time of the year.

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Letting a sore or wound dry out will help it heal faster.

Fiction

Studies have found this to be false. Healing is slower when the area dries over and forms a scab. Keep the area moist to increase the rate of healing. Use petroleum jelly or an over-the-counter antibiotic ointment and cover with a simple bandage or band-aid.

You can catch a cold from being chilled.

Fiction

This is one of the most common myths about colds. The only way to catch a cold is by exposure to a cold virus. If you catch a cold after being chilled, it is just a coincidence.



You need antibiotics to cure a cold.

Fiction

Antibiotics do not help with a cold. Antibiotics only kill bacteria. Colds are caused by a virus.

If you have a cold, you should drink lots of fluids to keep your body hydrated. Coffee, tea and colas may drain your system of fluids since they contain caffeine. Chicken soup is always a good choice. The steam from the soup can help break up your nasal congestion. Over-the-counter cold medicines can give you relief from aches and fever.

You can always take antibiotics – just in case.

Fiction

If you take antibiotics when you don't need them, they may not work when you do. Each time you take antibiotics there may be some bacteria they do not kill. Over time, bacteria can change and become harder to treat. Eventually, the antibiotics will no longer work.

When I am taking antibiotics for an infection, it's okay to stop taking them if I feel better after a few days.

Fiction

You must take your antibiotics for as long as they were prescribed. Even if you are feeling better, some bacteria may still be alive after the first few days of treatment.

If I don't need all of my antibiotics, I can save them for another time or another family member.

Fiction

There are many kinds of antibiotics. Each one works in a different way and on different types of bacteria, so don't save them for the next time you are sick. You should never give any of your pills to another person to take. In addition to being the wrong medicine for their problem, your medicine could interact with their other medicines. They could have a very serious allergic reaction.

I can prevent having diabetes even if someone in my family has it.

Fact

Studies have shown that people who are at a high risk of Type 2 diabetes can prevent or delay getting the disease by losing 5-7% of their body weight. For example, if you weigh 200 pounds, even losing 10 pounds can make a difference. Eating healthy foods and getting daily physical activity can also help. Prevent diabetes and you may also prevent other conditions like heart disease, blindness and kidney failure.



Low-tar or light cigarettes are not as harmful as regular cigarettes.

Fiction

There is no safe cigarette or tobacco product. A typical cigarette contains the same chemicals used to make rat poison and household cleaners. Cigars, pipes and spit tobacco are just as harmful as a cigarette. Avoid all tobacco products and exposure to second-hand smoke.

There is nothing we can do to prevent getting cancer.

Fiction

We can prevent some cancers by making healthy choices. Reduce your chances of getting cancer by eating healthy foods and exercising. Protecting your skin from the sun and not smoking or drinking alcohol can also be helpful.



Your fingernails can reveal clues about your health condition.

Fact

Changes in the color or texture of your nails could be a sign of disease somewhere else in your body. For example, dry nails that crack or split could be a sign of a slow thyroid. Biting your nails may seem like just an old habit but sometimes can be the sign of being overly anxious. Unusual looking nails may be harmless, but having your provider check them is always a good idea.

I don't need to visit my health care provider if I am feeling OK.

Fiction

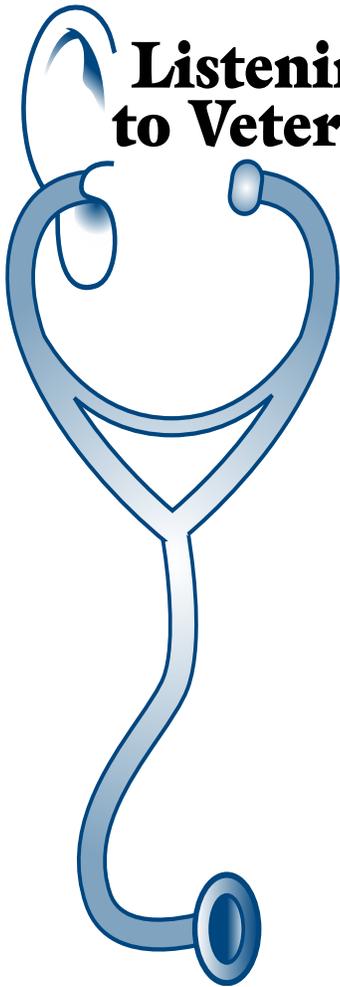
To stay healthy and prevent problems, it is important to have at least a yearly check-up. Your provider can check to see if you have any health problems that need to be treated. You can also get the information you need to stay healthy.

Sources:

www.webMD.com
www.healthline.com

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There is so much information about food in the magazines I read. How can I tell what I should really be eating?

Keep in mind that not all articles and reports come from trusted nutrition sources. Here is the scientific truth about some of the more common myths you may have read about.

Myth #1: All sources of fat are bad for me.

Truth

Fat does provide more calories in our diet than protein or carbohydrate. Still, a moderate amount is needed for normal body functions.

Different types of fat have different effects on the body. Saturated and trans fats are not good sources of fat. They raise cholesterol and serve no crucial role in your health. They are found in foods such as beef, pork, butter, cream, and other dairy products made from whole milk. They are also found in packed foods with partially hydrogenated oil listed on the label.

Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats are good sources of fat. They lower bad cholesterol and risk of heart disease.

They are found in vegetable oils, avocados, peanut butter, fish (such as salmon and trout), nuts, and seeds.



Fat intake should only be about 25–35 percent of your calories per day. Try to get most of the fat in your diet from the more healthy fats.

Myth #2: Skipping meals is a good way to lose weight.

Truth

People who skip meals tend to be hungrier later on in the day and may overeat. Studies show that people who do not eat breakfast and eat fewer times during the day tend to weigh more than those who eat breakfast and eat four to five smaller meals per day. Eating small meals helps to control appetite and curb overeating. It also helps to maintain a steady metabolic rate.

Myth #3: “Cholesterol-free” means a product is heart-healthy.

Truth

If the food is high in saturated or trans fat, it will raise your blood cholesterol levels even though it claims to be “cholesterol-free.” Always read the food label.

Myth #4: What you eat is more important than how much you eat.

Truth

The number of calories you eat must equal the number of calories you burn in order to maintain your current weight. To lose weight, calories eaten must be less than calories burned. Paying attention to portion size, while eating a variety of foods, is the best way to maintain a healthy weight.

Myth #5: All white foods are bad for me.

Truth

Many people, including people with diabetes, think all white foods are “bad.” Often they are talking about white bread, pasta, and rice. These are made from refined grains that are digested quickly in the body. Most refined grains do not have as many other nutrients as whole grains do. Brown foods such as whole grain bread, pasta and rice are high in fiber and nutrients. High-fiber foods tend to make you feel full longer and have other health benefits such as lowering cholesterol. However, both white grains and whole-wheat items have about the same number of calories. They also both affect the blood sugar in a similar way. Choose at least half of your grains from whole grain sources to enrich your diet.

For more information, talk to a Registered Dietitian at your VA facility.

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Mayo Clinic. Weight loss: Why does eating breakfast help control weight? <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/food-and-nutrition/AN01119>

USDA Food Pyramid. <http://www.mypyramid.gov/>



Common Beliefs about Women's Health

Taking care of our health is not a new notion for women. Women from all generations and cultures have followed health practices for our families and ourselves that we thought were useful.

“Aunt Agnes lived to be 100 years old and this is what she used” or “Grandma never had a sick day in her life and she lived to be 97... so it must be true.”

But are these practices or remedies really helpful? Can you trust the information? Could we be causing more harm to our health and those we care for?

Let us consider some of the more common beliefs about women's health.

Pregnant women need to eat more because they are eating for two.

Fact

While you may notice an increase in your appetite, your actual caloric needs increase only slightly. “Eating for two” can mean you will be overweight after the baby is born.



Women should not get the seasonal flu vaccine because it could give them a mild case of the flu.

Fact

The seasonal vaccine does not cause the flu. It is an inactive virus and cannot make you sick. The flu vaccine is good medicine for both women and men.

Most women over 40 gain weight and lose their vitality.

Fact

This does not need to be true. Decreased activity and poor eating habits cause weight gain and loss of energy, rather than aging.

A woman's heart attack symptoms are the same as a man's.

Fact

Women are more likely to present with "atypical symptoms" such as indigestion, shortness of breath, and throat pain.

Cancer cannot be prevented.

Fact

As many as 50% of cancer deaths are caused by smoking, drinking too much alcohol, poor eating habits, and weight gain.

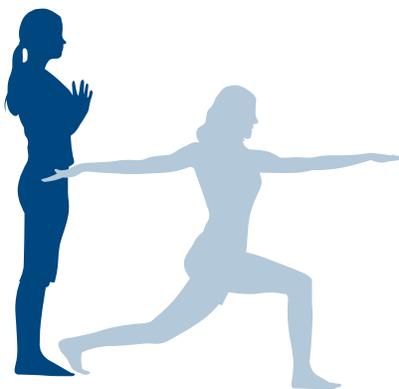
Women can make themselves less susceptible to cancer by avoiding these habits. Women should also be sure to have all the recommended preventive health screenings for cancer.



Women don't need to worry about osteoporosis until menopause.

Fact

Loss of bone mass begins long before menopause. Women can improve their bone health by participating in aerobic exercise, lifting weights, and walking. Eating foods rich in calcium and limiting alcohol will also help. Ask your health care provider if supplements are right for you.



Women go downhill after menopause. They suffer from sleep problems, hot flashes, memory loss, and depression.

Fact

Many women transition into menopause with only minor discomfort. If you are having any of these problems, there are options available to help you.

So where can you go for accurate health information?

The Women's Health Clinic at your VA facility or Community Based Outpatient Clinic is staffed by providers who are knowledgeable in women's health. They are your experts for health advice and are committed to providing you with the care that you deserve!

References:

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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.va.gov Choose "Services" then "Veterans Wellness and Patient Education"



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.

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