



Great Lakes VA HEALTHVIEWS

The Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12



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Get your Medicine *on Time!*



One of the great things about the VA is the Pharmacy program. The Pharmacy wants you to get all your prescriptions on time. Sometimes this does not happen.

Ordering your refills correctly can help.

- ◆ If you wait until you are almost out and then call your pharmacy, doctor or nurse, you may not get your refills on time.
- ◆ If you wait until the end of the week, the pharmacy refill service may not do overnight delivery on weekends or holidays.
- ◆ If you live in a rural area, it may take 12 to 14 days to get your prescriptions. So be sure to request your refills right away.

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We do not want you to miss taking any of your medicine. This is an important part of your health care.

The VA provides several ways for you to renew your prescriptions:

- 1. Mail in the refill slips as soon as you receive a prescription.**
- 2. Use the MyHealthVet web site to order refills.** It is easy to use. Check a box for the medicine you need to refill. It will also show you when your last refill was done and how many refills you have left.

You can register for this service at www.myhealth.va.gov or contact the My Healthvet Vet Coordinator at your local VA.



3. Use the VA Pharmacy Automated Telephone System.

If you have refills available, the automated system will submit the request to pharmacy. If there are no refills, or your prescription is expired, it will notify your provider to write a new prescription. This is called a renewal. Some prescriptions, such as narcotics, are not renewable through the automated telephone system.

If your prescription is not renewable, please contact your Provider or clinic.



To order refills or ask for renewals at your VA, use the following phone numbers:

Hines	708-202-2375
Iron Mountain	1-800-805-1870
Jesse Brown	1-888-878-6888
Madison	1-888-856-9039
Milwaukee	414-382-5287
North Chicago	1-800-393-0865
Tomah	1-800-252-7188

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Medicine *and* Pregnancy



Q. I'd like to have a baby. What do I need to know before I become pregnant?

A. It is very important to schedule a pre-pregnancy check up to talk to your doctor about all the medicines, vitamins, or herbs that you use. Bring the complete list so your health care provider can decide if anything needs to be changed or stopped. Remember to discuss your habits regarding caffeine, alcohol or smoking.

Q. How do I decide if a medicine is safe to use while pregnant?

A. You and your doctor need to talk about the medicine's risks and benefits. There may be times when using a medicine is a choice and other times when it is not a choice. The risk of not taking the medicine could be more harmful to you and the baby.

Q. How does my doctor know what medicine is safe for me to use?

A. Doctors use information from many sources to determine the safety of medicines. These include the medicine labels, medication reference manuals and FDA "pregnancy letter categories."

Q. What is the FDA "pregnancy letter category?"

A. The FDA created this system to help explain what is known about a medicine's effects during pregnancy. This system assigns a letter category to all prescription medicine.

Q. How are over-the-counter medicines rated?

A. Over-the-counter medicines do not have a pregnancy letter category. They have a Drug Facts label. This makes information about using the medicine easier to find.

Q. Are vitamins safe for me to take while pregnant?

A. Regular multivitamins and prenatal vitamins are safe to take. However, too many vitamins could harm your baby. It is important to talk to your doctor before starting anything new and to take only the dose prescribed for you.

Q. What about herbal or natural products and supplements?

A. Talk to your doctor before using any herbal product or dietary supplement. There have not been enough studies done to know if these products could harm your baby.



Q. In the future, will there be better ways to know if medicines are safe to use during pregnancy?

A. Drugs are rarely tested for safety in pregnant women for fear of harming the unborn baby. However, there are “pregnancy exposure registries” that help

doctors and researchers learn more about medicines and pregnant women.

Q. How can I find out if any of my medicines are on the “pregnancy exposure registry?”

A. Check the FDA website <http://www.fda.gov/womensregistries/default.htm>

Additional Resources:

<http://www.womenshealth.gov>
<http://www.healthywomen.org>

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HOME CARE CORNER

Did You Know VA Offers Maternity Care Benefits?

All women Veterans enrolled at a VA Medical Center or Clinic can receive maternity benefits through the VA.

If you become pregnant, contact your VA Health Care Provider. When you receive the letter authorizing your maternity care, make an appointment with the doctor you want to deliver your baby. Remember, you must choose a doctor who is willing to accept VA's rate of reimbursement.

Maternity benefits include prenatal care and vitamins, labor, delivery, and a postpartum exam. Breast pumps, prescriptions filled at a VA pharmacy, and other medically necessary treatments are also included.

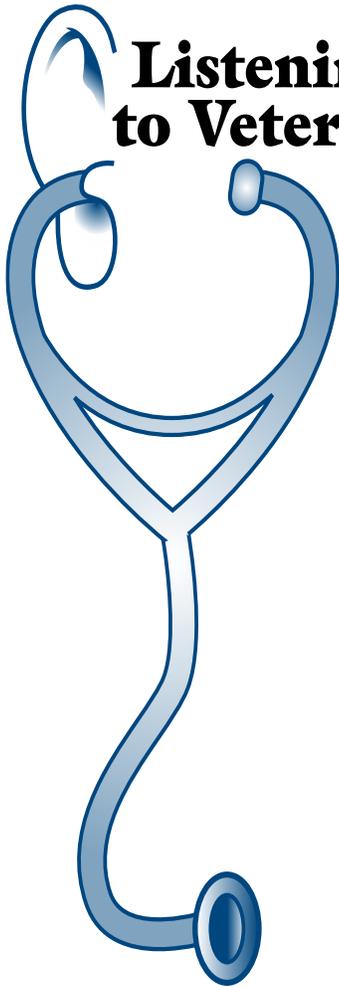
If you do not have private insurance, you must arrange for your baby's health insurance ahead of time. There are programs in each state that can help you obtain health insurance for your baby.

Prenatal vitamins are often ordered by your VA Primary Care provider. But other medicines related to your pregnancy should be ordered by the doctor who is delivering your baby. Your VA Pharmacy can fill prescriptions ordered by your non-VA doctor. There is a form that must be completed first. The requirement for a co-payment is similar to other copayments and is based on eligibility. Contact your local VA pharmacy for details.

After your six-week check up, you will usually return to your VA Primary Care Provider. Women who have a C-section may have several non-VA appointments before returning to the VA for care.

For further information regarding maternity care benefits contact your facility's Women Veterans Program Manager.

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How can I tell if I have Osteoporosis?

Your bones naturally lose some density (strength) as you get older. The loss of density weakens the bones. If your bones are somewhat less dense than normal, you have osteopenia. If your bones have lost a lot of density, you have osteoporosis.

Most often, people associate osteoporosis primarily with women, which is actually a myth. It is important to remember that men may also be at risk for osteoporosis. This is especially true if they have certain illnesses, a low testosterone level, are smokers, take certain medications, or are not active.

Each year there are approximately 700,000 spine fractures and 250,000 hip fractures in the US. Most of these fractures occur in people who have osteoporosis. To help prevent such fractures, it is important to diagnose osteoporosis early.

There are no symptoms in the early stages of the disease. Later on you may have:

- ◆ Bone pain or tenderness
- ◆ Fractures with little or no trauma
- ◆ Loss of height (as much as 6 inches over time)
- ◆ Low back pain due to fractures of the spinal bones
- ◆ Neck pain due to fractures of the spinal bones
- ◆ Stooped posture or kyphosis, also called a “dowager’s hump”

A Bone Mineral Density Test can be done to measure the density of your bones. Bone density tests are much more sensitive than normal x-rays. Normal x-rays do not detect bone loss until at least 30% of the bone mass has been lost. Bone density tests allow health care providers to diagnose weakening bones much earlier.

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The most common bone density test is the DEXA scan. It is painless. You will lie down on a padded table. It takes only a few minutes to check the bone density of your spine and hip. There are other tests besides the DEXA scan. Each test has different pros and cons. Talk to your health care provider about which test is right for you.

For more information:

Medline Plus

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus

KRAMES

ELECTRONIC PATIENT EDUCATION



Trusted health information at your finger tips. Using Krames Online will help you become a more well-informed patient!

You can find Krames Online on the Patient Education page of your local facility.

Hines – <http://www.hines.va.gov/patients/patiented.asp>

Iron Mountain – <http://www.ironmountain.va.gov/patients/patiented.asp>

Jesse Brown – <http://www.chicago.va.gov/patients/patiented.asp>

Madison – <http://www.madison.va.gov/pat/resources.asp>

Milwaukee – <http://www.milwaukee.va.gov/patients/patiented.asp>

North Chicago – <http://www.northchicago.va.gov/patients/patiented.asp>

Tomah – <http://www.tomah.va.gov/> (click on Krames Patient Education link on the left side of the main page)

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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 the VISN 12 webpage www.visn12.va.gov Click on the Newsletters link on the left side of the page.



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
Jesse Brown:	312-569-8387
Madison:	608-256-1901
Milwaukee:	1-888-469-6614
North Chicago:	1-800-393-0865
Tomah:	1-800-872-8662

***"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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VISN 12 VA Healthcare facilities are accredited by The Joint Commission. Joint Commission evaluates healthcare facilities on quality, safety of patient care and safety of the environment.

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 Joint Commission. You may request a "public information interview." Requests can be made to:

Division of Accreditation Operations
Office of Quality Monitoring
The Joint Commission
One Renaissance Boulevard
Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181
1-800-994-6610