



# Great Lakes VA HEALTHVIEWS

The Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12



Volume 8, Issue 4

Winter 2010

## 5 Tips



# 5 Tips for Getting the Most Out of Your Clinic Visit

Have you ever left your clinic appointment and just as you were about to get into your car.... you remembered that important question you wanted to ask the doctor?

Have you ever been frustrated that your office visit went by too fast and you did not get a chance to bring up a concern you wanted to talk to your health care provider about?

Forgetting to ask your provider a question or running out of time at your clinic visit are common problems for many Veterans. You can help manage your clinic visit time. A few communication tips and a little organization will go far in helping you get the most out of your next clinic visit.

*(continued on page 2)*

### ***Also in this issue...***

**Optical Illusions Help Reduce Portion Size ...Page 3**

**What is Ear Wax Build Up? .....Page 4**

**A Healthy Pregnancy Begins Before You Become Pregnant.....Page 6**

## Five tips for getting the most out of your clinic visit:

- 1. Bring a list of questions to your clinic appointment.** Keep a copy for yourself and give a copy to your health care team. A list lets your health care provider know what is important to cover and helps you to remember the questions you want to discuss.
- 2. Bring your health journal.** If you are tracking your blood sugar, blood pressure or other information be sure to bring copies to your appointment. Visit the My HealtheVet website (<http://www.myhealth.va.gov>) for tools that can help you track everything from exercise to cholesterol levels.
- 3. Bring a list of all of the medicines you take.** Your list should include medicines prescribed by your health provider, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbals,

ointments and suppositories. During the clinic visit, compare your list with your provider's list.

- 4. Use your time wisely.** Your clinic appointment is scheduled for a specific amount of time. Get your list out as soon as your health care provider enters the room. Take notes during your discussion with your provider. Ask a spouse or close friend to come to the visits and take notes for you. Four ears can be better than two!
- 5. Ask for more care information.** If your health provider talked about a new condition, treatment or medicine, ask for written information. My HealtheVet website has a "Research Health" area where you can find information that is trustworthy.

---

Submitted by:  
Sandy Cech, RN  
My HealtheVet Coordinator  
Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center

## Coming in 2011 – A New Way to Communicate with Your Health Team

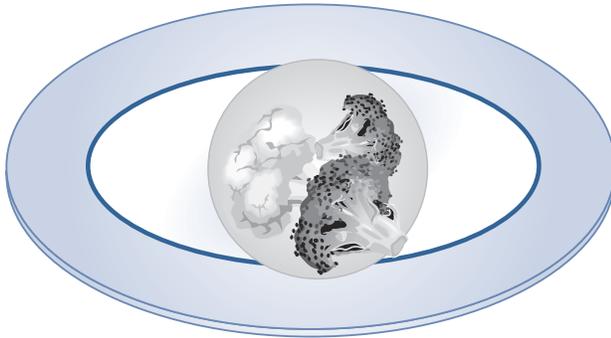
Soon you will be able to use your computer to send a message to your health care team. Secure Messaging in My HealtheVet will allow you to send a message about non-urgent health information such as prescription renewals, test results, and appointments. Secure Messaging is not just email. It is a communication tool that allows you to send a private message to your health care team.

Ask your VA health care team when Secure Messaging will start at your VA. In the meantime, be sure you have enrolled in My HealtheVet. Every VA has a My HealtheVet Coordinator who will help you get started. Even if you do not have a computer at home, My HealtheVet is available anywhere you can use a public computer, such as your community or VA library.

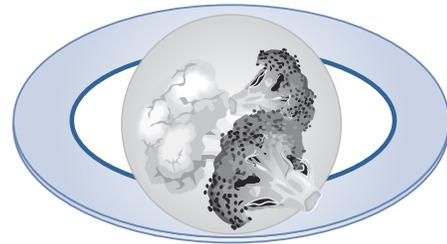
# Optical Illusions can Help Reduce Your Portion Size

There are many tricks that we can use to manage our weight. Here is a really easy one. Use an optical illusion to fool yourself into eating smaller portions.

**Take a look at the following picture:**



1 cup of food on a 12- inch dinner plate



1 cup of food on an 8- inch dinner plate

The grey circle on each picture represents 1 cup of food. It is exactly the same size in both pictures. Yet, the grey circle on the 12-inch dinner plate looks smaller than the grey circle on the 8-inch dinner plate. Research shows that when we use a larger plate, we tend to eat about 30% more than if we used a smaller plate!

Another way to cut down portions is to use smaller serving spoons and to eat with smaller utensils. The next time you indulge in some ice cream, use a small ice cream scoop, a small dish that holds about  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup, and use a baby spoon to savor every bite!

Visual illusions can also be used to control how much you drink. When glasses are short and wide, we tend to fill them with more fluid and drink more. To cut down on calories, pour your beverage in a slender glass.

If you would like to learn more weight loss tips, ask your provider for information about joining the MOVE!® (Managing Overweight and Obesity in Veterans Everywhere!) weight management program at your facility.



#### References:

“Super Bowls: Serving Bowl Size and Food Consumption”  
Journal of the American Medical Association 293: 14 (April 2005): 1727-28.

“Ice Cream Illusions: Bowl Size, Spoon Size, and Serving Size” American Journal of Preventive Medicine (September 2006).

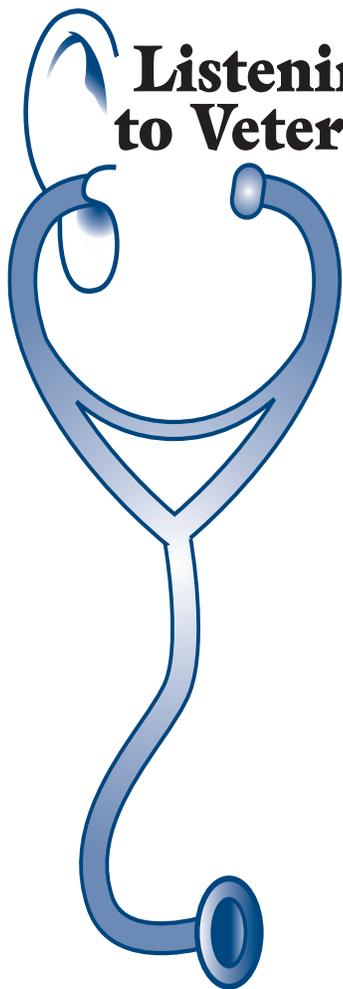
“Bottoms Up! The Influence of Elongation and Pouring on Consumption Volume” Journal of Consumer Research 30:3 (December 2003): 455-63.

---

Submitted by:

Erin Chambers, MPH, RD, CDE, CNSC, LDN  
Move! Coordinator

Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center



Answered by:  
Renay Montalbano, RN, BSN  
Aurora CBOC  
Edward Hines, Jr. VA Hospital

## What is ear wax build up?

We all have it! The outer part of the ear has special glands that produce earwax. It is our body's way of trapping dirt, protecting our ears and slowing the growth of bacteria. If you don't have enough earwax, you may have dry, itchy ears.

Normally the earwax dries up and falls out of your ear, carrying dust and dirt with it. However, sometimes a person can have too much wax (earwax build up).

This can cause problems such as:

- Earache
- Trouble hearing
- Ear noise (tinnitus)
- Feeling of fullness in the ear



Do not try to treat this yourself. Having these symptoms does not automatically mean you have earwax buildup. Only your health care provider can decide if you have earwax buildup or some other problem with your ears. Make an appointment to see your health care provider right away.

Tell your provider:

- ✓ How long you have been having the problems with your ears.
- ✓ If you have had any drainage from your ears.
- ✓ If you have had earaches, difficulty hearing or drainage in the past.
- ✓ If you have the symptoms off-and-on or constantly.

Your health care provider will look in your ear with a piece of equipment called an otoscope. This allows your provider to see if your eardrum is blocked due to earwax.

If you do have earwax build up, it can be removed by flushing warm water in your ear. It can also be removed using over-the-counter eardrops to soften the wax. There are other ways to remove the wax. Your provider will tell you the best way to take care of your problem.

**Dos and Don'ts for ear wax problems:**

**DO** tell your provider if you are having problems hearing. It does not always mean you need a hearing aid. If you already have a hearing aid, you can still have problems with earwax.

**Do NOT** ignore this simple problem that can be easily fixed in a clinic visit. If it is not earwax, then your provider can treat the real problem.

**DO** call your primary care provider if you are having any problems with your ears.

**DO NOT** treat yourself. Do not try to clean out the wax yourself. Cotton tips can make the problem worse by pushing the wax in deeper and damaging the ear drum.



Reference

Mayo Clinic. Ear Wax Blockage. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/earwax-blockage/DS00052/DSECTION=tests-and-diagnosis>. August, 2009

This year, you only need

**1**

**TAKE THE TIME.  
GET YOUR FLU SHOT**

One Gets It Done

It protects against both seasonal and H1N1 flu.

**FLU SHOT**

2010-2011 Flu Season

*Infection:*  
Don't Pass It On

[www.publichealth.va.gov/InfectionDontPassItOn](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/InfectionDontPassItOn)



## The Women's View

# A Healthy Pregnancy Begins Before You Become Pregnant

Thinking about a pregnancy in your future? Pre-pregnancy planning, also called preconception counseling is very important. The best thing is that it just requires a visit to your primary care provider.

Before you become pregnant, address those health issues that may affect your baby.

- ❖ **Are you overweight?** Being overweight can increase your risk of gestational diabetes. It may also make it harder for you to become pregnant.
- ❖ **Are you a smoker?** Smoking increases the risk of having a baby with low birth weight. Smoking also increases your risk for miscarriage, bleeding and delivering your baby early. Studies have also shown that your baby has a higher risk of dying from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- ❖ **Do you drink alcohol?** Drinking during pregnancy can cause your baby to have Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome can lead to mental retardation, slow growth and birth defects of the face.
- ❖ **Do you use drugs?** Marijuana, cocaine and other illegal drugs increase your risk of having a miscarriage, having the baby too early and having a child born with birth defects. With some of these drugs, your baby will be born addicted and will have to go through withdrawal.



One of the most important things you can do for yourself and your baby before you become pregnant is also one of the simplest – take a daily vitamin! Folic acid, found in prenatal vitamins can cut the risk of major birth defects of the baby’s brain and spine by 50 to 70%.

Your primary care provider will want to talk to you about all of these issues BEFORE you become pregnant. Your Provider will also want to discuss other conditions that you may have, such as depression, diabetes or epilepsy. This is especially important if you take medicine for these other health issues. This does not mean that you have to stop taking all medicines during your pregnancy. But you may want to switch to medicines that have been shown to be safer during pregnancy.

So, as you can see, the time to start thinking about your pregnancy is BEFORE you become pregnant! The earlier you pay attention to the way you eat, rest, exercise, work and play, the better your chances of having a healthy baby.

For more information: <http://www.womenshealth.gov/>



---

Submitted by:  
Anna Bonney, RN  
Women Veterans Program Manager  
James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center

## WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE

*You served, you deserve*

★ *the best care anywhere*



**Great Lakes VA  
Healthviews Editorial  
Committee:**

Jill Zahn  
Senior Editor  
Milwaukee VAMC

Kathleen Ford  
Hines VAH

Jeanne Chouinard  
Iron Mountain VAMC

Constance Cornett  
Jesse Brown VAMC

Gail Meissen  
Madison VAMC

Alfreda Rhodes-King  
Captain James A. Lovell  
Federal Health Care Center

Kathy Johnson  
Tomah VAMC

Kim Chapman  
Layout and Design  
Milwaukee VAMC

**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](http://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
Chicago:	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.

**E-mail address:**

SrEditorGreatLakesVAHealthviews@va.gov

**Mailing address:**

Jill Zahn  
Milwaukee VA Medical Center Library  
5000 W. National Avenue  
Milwaukee, WI 53295

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