



Great Lakes VA HEALTHVIEWS

The Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12



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Sleep Like a Baby

Many of us would love to sleep like a baby. However, that kind of sleep is just not possible for adults. As we age, our sleep naturally changes. Over time, our body produces less of the hormones that affect our sleep. There are many factors that affect our sleep. Some of these lead to insomnia. This in turn can cause fatigue, concentration and memory problems.

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It can also cause emotional problems such as depression and anxiety, and increased risk for medical problems.

Insomnia is a common complaint among Americans. It is even more so among Veterans. Approximately 30-40% of adults have insomnia each year. Ten to 15% of adults indicate that they have chronic insomnia. Veterans have an even higher rate of insomnia. Sixty-two% of Vietnam Veterans, 6-30% of Gulf War Veterans, and 70% of OEF/OIF/OND Veterans report insomnia.

So what is insomnia?

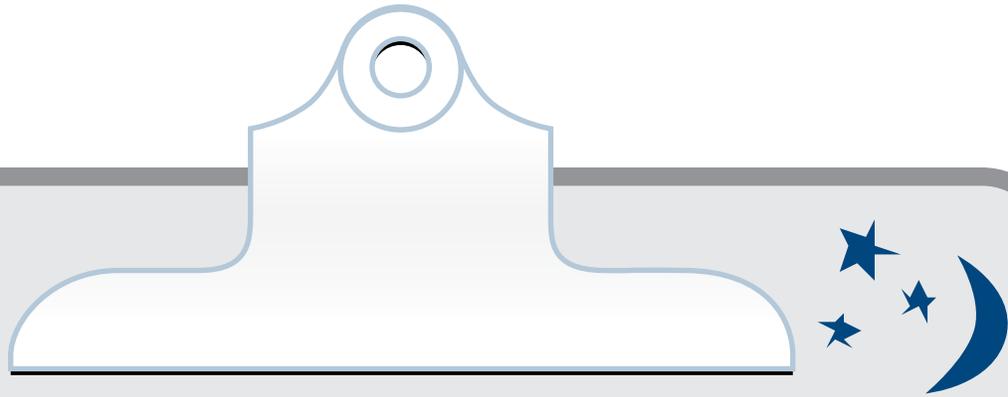
Insomnia includes trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, waking too early, or not feeling refreshed upon waking. Causes of insomnia include stress, prescription medication and medical disorders. It also includes psychiatric disorders, like depression, anxiety, PTSD, and substance use. Once insomnia starts, a person may develop behavioral and thought patterns that worsen and prolong sleep problems.

It is best to seek professional help when sleep problems begin to impair your mood, or if you have trouble functioning throughout the day. Most often, reducing stress or better coping with stress can ease insomnia. Ways to cope with stress include relaxation. This can be reading, listening to music, or relaxation exercises like guided imagery, visualization, deep breathing, or progressive muscle relaxation.



If you believe that you have insomnia, please talk with your primary care provider. Your provider will direct you to appropriate treatment and services. Cognitive-behavioral treatment for insomnia has been shown to be more effective than medication alone. This treatment works to change behaviors that may affect sleep. It also addresses any negative and harmful thoughts you have about your sleep problems.

Submitted by:
Brenda Reed, PsyD, CBSM
Licensed Psychologist
Certified in Behavioral Sleep Medicine
Oscar G Johnson VAMC - Iron Mountain, MI



Helpful Tips for Insomnia:

- ✓ Keep a regular sleep schedule, especially a consistent wake time.
- ✓ Do not take naps, if at all possible. If you take a nap, try to limit it to less than 45 minutes.
- ✓ Avoid stimulants before bed. These include caffeine (soda, tea, coffee, chocolate) and nicotine (cigarettes, chewing tobacco).
- ✓ Limit alcohol intake throughout the day, but especially before bed.
- ✓ Avoid exercise within 3 to 4 hours of bedtime.
- ✓ Have a relaxing bedtime routine. Your mind and body might not shut down as quickly as you would like. Having a bedtime routine can help to signal your mind and body that it is time to relax.
- ✓ Use the bed and bedroom for sleep and sex only. The more activities you do in the bedroom, the more confused your mind and body are about the purpose of being in there.
- ✓ If you are not sleeping within 15 to 20 minutes, get out of bed. Focus on something relaxing until you feel relaxed and sleepy enough to get into bed.



The Women's View

Keep Yourself Free of HPV

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted virus in the United States. More than 40 types of HPV are passed by sexual contact.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than half of sexually active men and women are infected with this virus at some time in their lives. Millions of Americans are already infected with HPV and don't know it. That is because most HPV infections do not cause any symptoms.

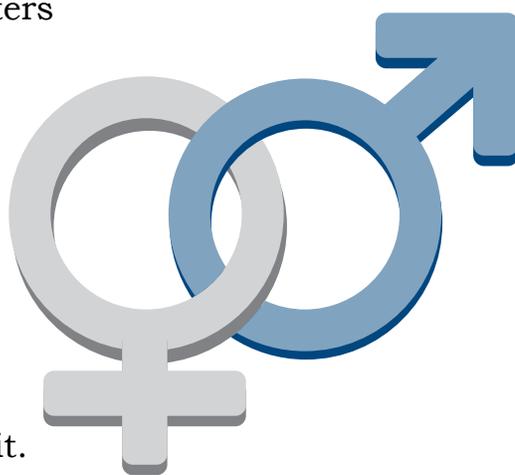
HPV has been found to cause a number of different types of cancer in females and males. HPV has been linked to cervical cancer. About 12,000 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer every year in the United States. Cervical cancer is the second most common cause of cancer deaths in women. HPV has also been linked to several other cancer types in women such as vaginal and vulvar

cancers. HPV can cause genital warts and anal cancer in both males and females.

Vaccines are available for both men and women to help prevent most of these cancer cases. These vaccines are Gardasil and Cervarix. Patients are given one or the other. Both of these vaccines protect against the two HPV types that cause 70% of cervical cancers, and cause most HPV-induced genital and head and neck cancers.

Gardasil also protects against the two HPV types that cause 90% of genital warts.

These vaccines are given as a series of three doses over 6 month's time. They are available to males and females between 11 through 26 years of age. The vaccine does not cure existing HPV infections or disease (such as genital warts) and it is most effective when it is given before a person's first sexual contact.



All women who ever had sex are at risk for cervical cancer. HPV is passed through genital contact, most often during vaginal or anal sex. HPV may also be passed during oral sex.

Since most HPV infections do not cause any symptoms, people may not be aware that they have HPV, or that they are passing it to their partner. Therefore, it may not be possible to determine who gave you HPV or when you got it.

Routine pap exams are important to screen for cervical cancer. The Pap test looks for abnormal cells on your cervix that could turn into cancer over time. Oftentimes, problems can be found and treated before they turn into cancer.

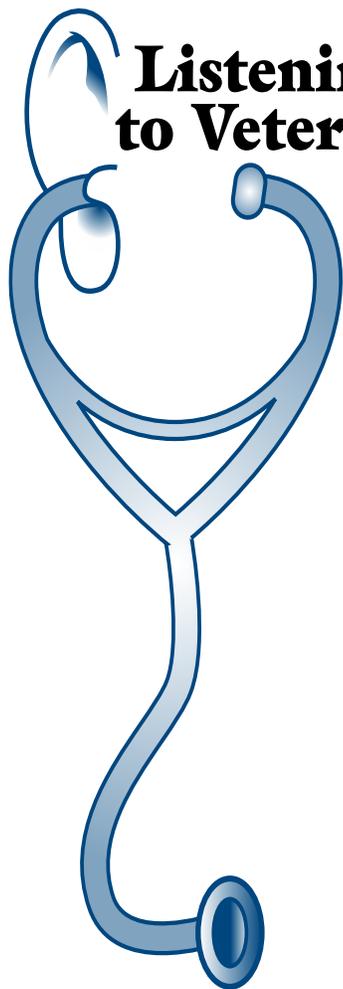


The use of condoms during sex may lower your chance of contracting HPV. However, HPV virus can be present on the skin that is not covered by the condom. The best prevention available, other than abstinence, is believed to be the HPV vaccine.

It is important that you discuss all of your health history and life-style behaviors with your primary health care provider. Together you can develop that best health care plan for you.

Submitted by:
Barbara Robinson, RN
Women Veterans Program Manager
Oscar G Johnson VAMC - Iron Mountain, MI

Source:
“HPV (Human Papillomavirus) Vaccine.” What you need to know. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 2011-05-03. Retrieved on 2012-02-01 from: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-hpv-gardasil.pdf>

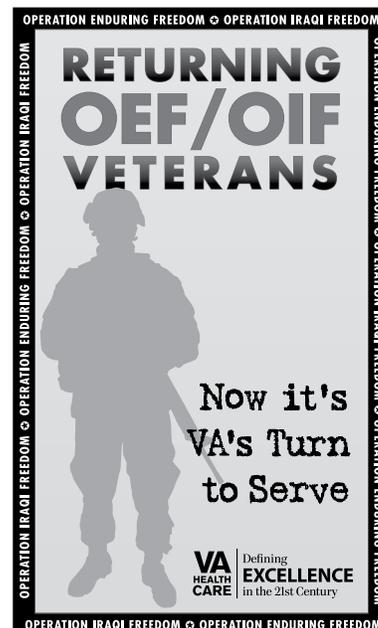


Answered by:
Kathleen Truax, RN, MSN
OEF/OIF/OND Program Manager
Oscar G Johnson VAMC -
Iron Mountain, MI

What are the Enhanced Benefits for Returning Combat Soldiers?

The VA is committed to supporting the troops returning from Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn) and Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom). These all-volunteer troops accepted the call to defend and protect our way of life. It is our turn to repay that debt. One of the ways troops are being supported within the VA is through enhanced benefits.

These benefits help our newest combat Veterans return home and receive the care and treatment they need.



5 Years of Free Health Care:

OEF/OIF/OND combat Veterans can receive free medical care for any condition that may be related to their service time in a combat theater. The 5 years starts from the date of discharge. For soldiers in the National Guard and Reserves, the 5 year window will restart with each redeployment.

180 Day Dental Benefit

OEF/OIF/OND combat Veterans may be eligible for a one-time dental benefit. The veteran must apply for this benefit within 180 days of their separation from active duty.

Vet Centers

Veterans from ANY combat era may seek help at their local Vet Center. Readjustment counseling and outreach services are available for the Veteran and their family. This service is at no cost to the Veteran.



Counseling

Many returning combat Veterans suffer from a number of stressors. The VA has counselors that are specially trained to aid these Veterans. They can help Veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. The VA also has counselors ready to help combat Veterans in readjusting to civilian life. The VA can also help them readjust to family life. Marriage and family counseling are new services offered to combat Veterans. The VA wants to help them safely return from war time to peace time.

Women's Healthcare

An increase in women Veterans has led to better benefits for all female Veterans. Women Veterans of all eras are now able to receive women's health care at their local VA. This includes maternity benefits. Each VA hospital has a Women Veterans Program Manager to help our women Veterans with their special needs. If you are a female Veteran and need help, contact your nearest VA hospital to speak with the Program Manager.

Traumatic Brain Injury

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is one of the most common injuries of combat Veterans. This injury may occur after exposure to blasts and head injuries. All returning combat Veterans are screened for TBI.

Veterans with a positive screen are sent for additional testing. Veterans that are found to have a TBI may receive care at specialty VA centers located throughout the US.

Schooling

In support of education, the GI Bill pays benefits to eligible Veterans, reservists, and active duty service members. This benefit covers college degree programs, apprenticeships, on-the-job-training, and non-college degree programs. The Post 9-11 GI Bill allows post 9-11 combat Veterans to transfer some of their educational benefits to a spouse or child.

Case Management

Post 9-11 combat Veterans with complex needs may choose to be assisted by a Case Manager. The Case Manager will monitor your health care to make sure your needs are being met. They will also make sure the proper follow-up appointments are made.

To find out if you are eligible for any of these enhanced benefits, contact the Enrollment and Eligibility Officer at your nearest VA.

**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

Alfreda Rhodes-King
Lovell FHCC

Pamela McGranahan
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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 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
Lovell:	1-800-393-0865
Madison:	608-256-1901
Milwaukee:	1-888-469-6614
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:

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The Joint Commission
One Renaissance Boulevard
Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181
1-800-994-6610