Great Lakes VA
HEALTHVIEWS
The Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12

VA Great Lakes Health Care System

Volume 10, Issue 2 Summer 2012

Safe Use of Opioids

Opioids (also called "opiates" or "narcotics") are used to treat chronic pain. You should only consider using an opioid for pain after trying all other options. In addition, opioids should only be taken for a short period of time. Research has shown that long term use of opioids (more than 3 months) may not continue to provide pain relief or improve function.

When discussing opioids with your Provider, be sure to also discuss any other medicines you are taking. Troops return from Iraq and Afghanistan with PTSD, depression, mild head injury, and back pain and are also taking medicine for these conditions. Combining drugs used for anxiety, nightmares and PTSD, along with opioids, can create a very dangerous cocktail. One third of the 162 suicides by active duty soldiers in 2009 involved prescribed medicines. From 2006 to 2009, 101 soldiers accidently died from a toxic mixture of prescription drugs.

Before starting opioids, talk to your health care team about all your options. The long term use of opioid pain medicine has proven to be more dangerous than first thought and may be an unnecessary risk.

Also in this issue...

Eat Wisely When You Have Diabetes or Pre-Diabetes.....Page 3

Domestic Violence and Veterans .....Page 4

What should I do with medicine I'm not taking anymore?.....Page 6

(continued on page 2)

If your Provider prescribes opioids, it is important to use them correctly:

1. **DO take your pain medicines as prescribed.** Always take the right dose at the right time.

2. **DON'T take extra doses of your pain medicine.** You could become very sick or die from an overdose. You may also run out of your medicine before you can get your next refill. If you have severe, increased, or new pain, don't just take more of your opioids. Call your pain treatment Provider or clinic.

3. **DO tell *all* your Providers if you are currently taking opioids.**

4. **DO tell your usual VA Provider if you get an opioid prescription from another Provider.** Tell your VA Provider no later than the next weekday.

5. **DON'T stop taking opioids on your own.** Stop taking your medicine only when your Provider tells you to. If you are told to stop, tell your Provider if you are having withdrawal symptoms such as:
   - Belly cramps
   - Extra saliva
   - Anxiety
   - Sweats
   - Nausea
   - Loss of appetite
   - Tears in your eyes
   - Trouble sleeping
   - Runny nose
   - "Goose bumps"
   - Muscle aches /cramps
   - Increased heart rate
   - Increased blood pressure
   - Feeling very tired

6. **DO be cautious about driving or operating machinery.** Never drive or operate machinery if you feel sleepy or confused. State laws may determine what kinds of jobs you can do when you are taking opioids. You may not be able to operate heavy machinery or drive a truck or public vehicle, such as a bus.

7. **DON'T drink alcohol or take "street" drugs.** It is *not* safe to drink alcohol or use illegal "street drugs" when you are taking opioids.

8. **DO get help from your friends and family.** Your Provider may encourage you to have your friends or family members learn more about opioid use.

9. **DON'T sell or give away your opioids.** Do not let any other people take or use your medicines. This is dangerous and illegal and could lead to criminal charges. Keep your medicines in a safe and secure place. The VA may not replace doses that are lost, stolen, or shared with others.

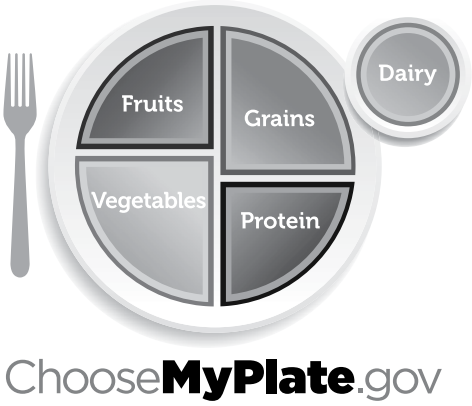
Submitted by:
Barbara Knippel, RN-C, BSN
Primary Care Gold Clinic
Milwaukee, WI VAMC

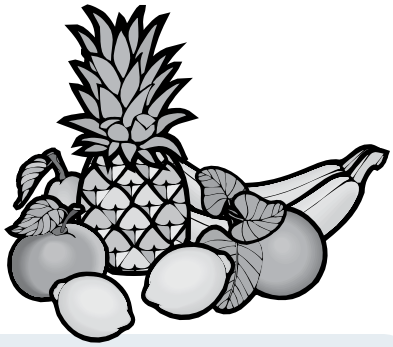
Source: Patient's Guide to Opioid Therapy. VA National Pain Management Committee.

Eat Wisely When You Have Diabetes or Pre-Diabetes

Diabetes is a chronic disease in which your blood sugar is too high. High blood sugar can lead to a variety of health problems. These include: heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, eye problems, dental disease, nerve damage, and even amputation.

Eating Wisely to control blood sugar can be easy. Include high fiber foods and low fat protein sources in your meals. Try to eat 25-35 grams of fiber daily. Fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains have about 2-3 grams of fiber per serving. Dried beans and lentils have even more fiber and can be substituted for meat. Protein and fiber increase the feeling of fullness and helps to reduce spikes in blood sugar.





Tips to Eat Wisely this Summer:

1. Include 1-2 cups of vegetables at meals:
   - grilled mushrooms, cherry tomatoes, chopped pepper and celery on a stick
   - a fresh green salad covered with sliced strawberries or tangerine wedges
2. Eat healthy snacks:
   - fresh seasonal fruits such as berries, melons, and pears
   - fresh fruit and ice pureed for a sugar free sorbet
   - apple slices topped with cinnamon or a little peanut butter
   - light or low-fat Greek yogurt
3. Grill chicken breasts or low-fat burgers using ground round or turkey. Add a whole grain bun, topped off with just a slice of tomato, lettuce and mustard.
4. Use apple cider vinegar, lemon, garlic, herbs and spices to marinate meats.
5. Limit or avoid alcohol and other high calorie beverages.

Ask your healthcare team for more information about Eating Wisely. Your clinic dietitian can help you develop an action plan for smarter meals and snacks.

Submitted by:
Rita Mingesz, MEd, RD, CD, CHES
Milwaukee, WI VAMC

Source: www.cdc.gov

The Women's View

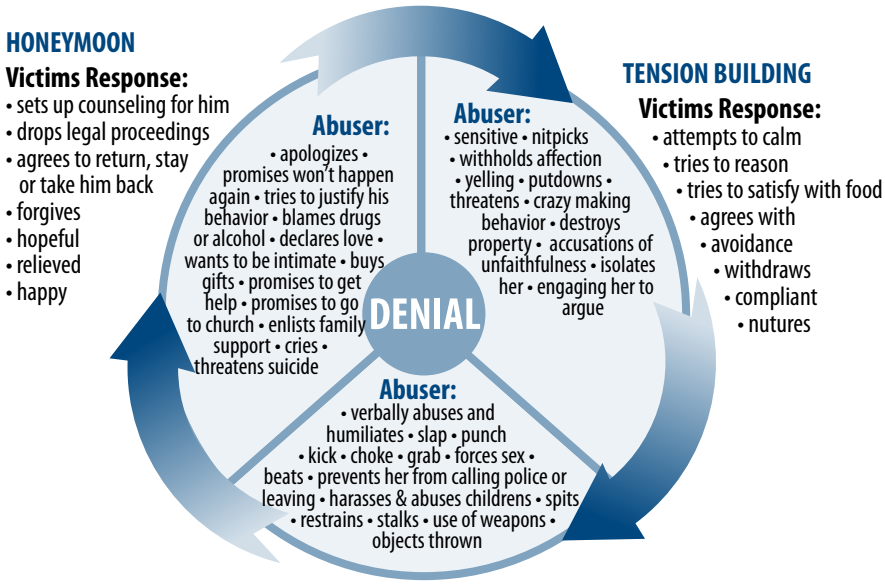
Domestic Violence and Veterans

Recently, a colleague told me that it wasn't until she read a sign about domestic violence while sitting in a bathroom stall that she was able to put a name to her own experience.

The sign said: **Has someone you have known or loved:**

- ✔ Kept track of your time?
- ✔ Accused you of cheating?
- ✔ Made it tough for you to see family and friends, go to work, school, doctor, or get birth control?
- ✔ Destroyed your things or hurt your pets?
- ✔ Controlled all the money decisions?
- ✔ Hit, choked, slapped, kicked or bitten you or your children?
- ✔ Threatened to hurt you or your children sexually?
- ✔ Forced you to have sex?

If you answered *"yes"* to any of these questions . . . You are not alone.



Used with permission
Lenore Walker
The Battered Woman. Harper & Row, 1979

Domestic Violence (DV) is illegal.

Domestic Violence (also called Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) can be physical, emotional or sexual. Illinois, Wisconsin and Michigan all have laws which make domestic violence a crime.

Michigan Law http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?mcl-400-1501
Wisconsin Law http://wilawlibrary.gov/topics/familylaw/domesticabuse.php
Illinois Law http://www.ilcadv.org/dv_law_in_il/idva_booklet_1-2009.pdf

While each law is slightly different, they all agree that the abuser and victim must be spouses, former spouses, have a child in common, or live together currently or in the past. Domestic violence is often defined as:

- ✔ Causing or attempting to cause physical or mental harm to a family or household member.
- ✔ Placing a family or household member in fear of physical or mental harm.
- ✔ Causing or attempting to cause a family or household member to engage in involuntary sexual activity by force, threat of force, or duress.
- ✔ Engaging in activity toward a family or household member that would cause a reasonable person to feel terrorized, frightened, intimidated, threatened, harassed, or molested.

How big a problem is Domestic Violence?

- ✔ 85% of victims are women.
- ✔ Women are 5 to 8 times more likely than men to be victimized by an intimate partner.
- ✔ One in every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime.
- ✔ Females 20 to 24 years of age are at greatest risk.

How to get help

Contact your VA primary care provider, social worker or mental health provider. You will be able to talk about your situation and discuss your options. They will help to find a shelter or other safety planning options for you and your children.

For more information:

National Domestic Violence Hotline
800-799-7233 (SAFE)

Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence http://www.wcadv.org/home

Illinois coalition against domestic violence http://www.ilcadv.org/

Michigan coalition against domestic violence http://www.mcadsv.org/

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence http://www.nrcdv.org/

Submitted by:
Jill Feldman, PhD, LCSW
Women Veterans Program Manager
Milwaukee,WI VAMC

What should I do with medicine that I am not taking anymore?

It is very important to dispose of any medicine your Provider has told you to stop taking. There are several reasons why this is important.

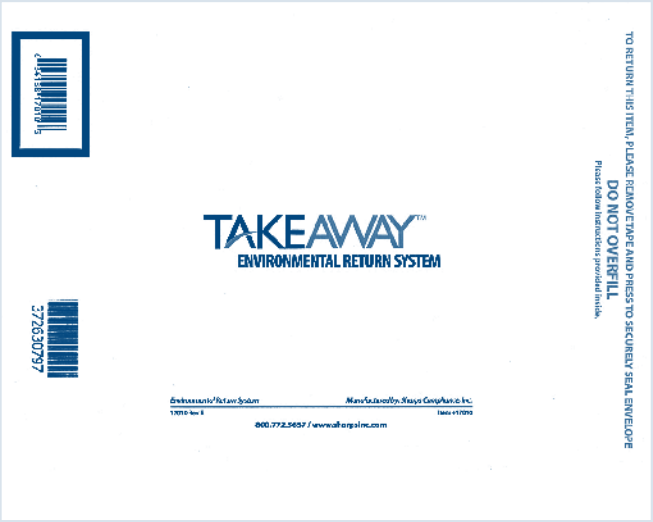
- If you dispose of the medicine, you won't make the mistake of accidentally taking something you no longer need.
- When medicine gets older, it loses strength. All VA prescriptions have an expiration date on the prescription label. After that date, the medicine may not have the same effect it once did. In some cases old prescriptions can be harmful.
- Disposing of medicines reduces the risk that someone else will abuse it. After marijuana, prescription medicines are the drugs most commonly abused by teenagers. Most of these drugs are taken from friends and family members without their knowledge.

Answered by:
Angie Paniagua, PharmD, BCPS, CGP
Acting Pharmacy Program Manager
Pharmacy Clinical Manager
Milwaukee, WI VAMC

No More Flushing

Years ago, patients were instructed to flush medicine into the sewage system. This is no longer recommended due to concerns about the environment. Putting prescriptions into the water system has been shown to have a negative effect on fish and other water animals.

Many communities offer medicine "take-back" programs. You can drop off your unwanted medicines for disposal. Check with your local community to see if they offer this program.



VISN 12 pharmacies are NOT able to take back medicine. Instead, VISN 12 pharmacies offer the **"Takeaway Environmental Return System."** The Takeaway system is a postage paid mailing envelope that is available at all VISN 12 Pharmacies.

1. Request a Takeaway envelope from your medical center pharmacy. Place any unneeded medicine into the envelope and seal it shut. To save room, it is OK to mix different prescription items into one bottle.

2. Drop the package into any mailbox. These envelopes are sent to a company in Texas, where the package is burned. The remains are incorporated into the asphalt in Texas.

3. This process is the easiest way to dispose of unneeded medicines for VISN 12 patients. The pharmacy does have to pay to use this program, so the envelopes are only available for VISN 12 patients. They are not provided to non-VA patients.

If you are unable to use the Takeaway program and there are no collection opportunities in your community, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does recommend that medicine be disposed of in the household trash. Mix the tablets or capsules in a substance such as kitty litter or used coffee grounds. This reduces the risk of someone else taking medicine from your trash or of animals eating the medicine.

Disposal of Sharps

Another important issue is the proper disposal of used needles, syringes, lancets, or any other items that may have come in contact with blood. These items should be disposed in a Sharps Container. This reduces the risk of accidental needle sticks. An accidental needle stick can transmit a variety of infectious disease such as HIV, hepatitis B or C.

Sharps containers are available through your VA Pharmacy. Ask your Provider to write you a prescription for a Sharps Container and it may be mailed directly to your home. Contact your Pharmacy for directions on Sharps Container disposal.

> *Remember:* proper disposal of medicine is an important issue for our communities and the environment. Do your part to ensure the safe disposal of the medicines you no longer use.

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
Madison VAMC

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 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:

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