



Great Lakes VA HEALTHVIEWS

A Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12



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On Pins and Needles



What is Diabetic Neuropathy?

Diabetic neuropathy is damage to nerves in the body caused by diabetes. Some form of nerve damage occurs in up to 60-70% of people with diabetes. Over time, people with diabetes may develop nerve damage throughout the body. Injured nerves may result in pain, tingling, or numbness (loss of feeling) in the hands, arms, feet, and legs. Nerve damage can also affect major organ systems, including the heart, stomach, intestines, and sex organs.

What causes it?

Nerve problems can develop at any time. However, the risk rises with age and the longer you have diabetes. Nerves are more likely to be injured if blood glucose (sugar) levels are not well-controlled. Other things which may increase the chance of nerve damage include high blood fat levels, trauma to nerves, and lifestyle factors such as smoking and alcohol use.

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What are the symptoms?

The most common type of diabetic nerve damage is peripheral neuropathy. When the nerves to the arms or legs are injured, a person may have numbness, tingling or pain. The muscles in the hands and feet may get weaker and thinner. This can lead to changes in the shape of the feet or hands. Changes in the feet make injury more likely. Injuries put a person at risk for amputation.

Autonomic neuropathy involves damage to the nerves that control body functions. Symptoms may include rapidly falling blood pressure with dizziness, nausea, vomiting, bloating, diarrhea or constipation. Injured bladder nerves lead to problems passing urine. The nerves dealing with sexual function can be damaged as well. This results in sexual problems for both men and women.

What can I do about it?

The first step is to bring blood glucose levels as close to normal as possible. Symptoms may get a little worse when blood glucose control is first attempted. However, over time, lower blood sugar helps prevent or delay additional nerve damage. In the meantime, it is important to be very careful to avoid injury, especially to the feet.



Treatment depends on the nerves affected:

- Painful peripheral neuropathy may be treated with oral pain relievers. Biofeedback training and special devices (such as TENS units) may be helpful as well.
- When the nerves to the gut are affected, mild symptoms may be relieved by changes in eating habits, such as small, frequent meals. Severe symptoms may require medicine to speed up digestion or relieve nausea or bowel problems.
- Bladder problems may be treated with pills. Emptying the bladder at set times will help.
- When the sexual organs are affected, treatments may include lifestyle changes, medicine, or devices.

Learn all you can about ways to manage your diabetes. Speak with a diabetes educator or attend a class. Be sure to discuss your symptoms honestly with your health care team. That will help them find the best treatment for you!

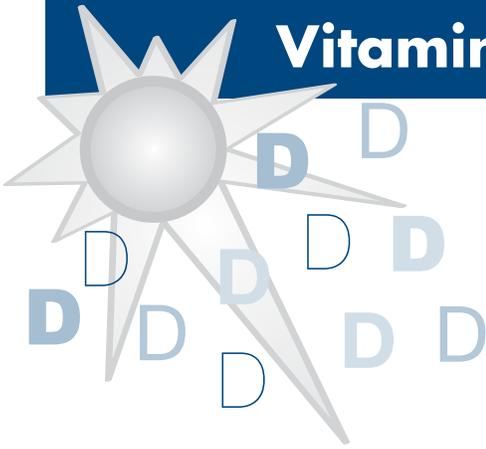
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Vitamin D... Don't Forget About Me!



Getting enough Vitamin D is vital to your health. Vitamin D raises the amount of calcium in your body. Because of this, it plays a major role in building and keeping strong bones.

People who are low in Vitamin D increase their risk for low bone density, osteoporosis, and fractures. Vitamin D may also provide protection against high blood pressure, cancer, diabetes, and heart disease.

How much do we need?

Humans get Vitamin D from exposure to sunlight, from their diet, and from dietary supplements.

Daily Amounts of Vitamin D:

Birth-12 months = 400 IU

1-70 years = 600 IU

71+ years = 800 IU

Pregnant/Breast feeding = 600 IU

1. Spend some time in the sun

Sun rays soak in and are turned into Vitamin D in our bodies. But the season, time of day, cloud cover, and skin color affect the amount of Vitamin D you make. Use common sense to prevent sunburn and sun damage.

2. Eat foods that contain Vitamin D

Vitamin D is found naturally in foods such as:

- ☼ Salmon (3 oz cooked = 447 IU)
- ☼ Tuna (3 oz cooked = 154 IU)
- ☼ Eggs -1 large (1 yolk = 41 IU)
- ☼ Cod liver oil (1 Tbsp = 1,360 IU)

In the U.S., Vitamin D is added to some food sources such as milk, juice and cereal.

- ☼ Milk (1 cup = 115 IU)
- ☼ Juice (1 cup = 137 IU)
- ☼ Cereal (0.75-1 cup = 40 IU)

3. Consider Vitamin D Dietary Supplements

Vitamin D is included in most multivitamins. It is usually in strengths from 50 IU to 1,000 IU. Always ask your doctor before taking any supplements.

References:

- American Medical Association Staff. Vitamin D. ama-assn.org/go/healthtips. Published 2011. Accessed October 29, 2012.
- Mayo Clinic Staff. Vitamin D. Mayo Clinic. http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/vitamin-d/NS_patient-vitamind. Published September 1, 2012. Accessed October 24, 2012.
- Mitchell D. The relationship between vitamin D and cancer. *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing*. 2011;15(5):557-560.

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The Women's View

★ *You Served, You Deserve the Best Care Anywhere* ★

High quality service is what Veterans expect at every VA facility. The mission of Women Veterans Health Care is to be a national leader in providing health care for women. This is a commitment we share in VISN 12.

Is my VA Facility Prepared to Care for Women Veterans?

Since the VA has cared primarily for males, some may question if we are prepared to care for the needs of female Veterans. The answer is YES. VA facilities in VISN 12 are equipped to meet the needs of the entire spectrum of female Veterans.

We deliver the highest quality health care while offering the privacy, dignity, and sensitivity you deserve.

The range of comprehensive, women-specific, primary care services offered in VISN 12 include:

- ★ Gynecology/Urogynecology
- ★ Maternity care, including delivery and care of the newborn
- ★ Breast care, including mammography

- ★ Menopause management
- ★ Reproductive health counseling, including birth control options
- ★ Aging issues
- ★ Women's Mental Health treatment
- ★ Military Sexual Trauma treatment
- ★ Nutrition counseling
- ★ Social Work issues
- ★ Pharmacy

Specialty Care includes:

- ★ Management and screening of chronic conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer, glandular disorders, osteoporosis, pain management, fibromyalgia, and sexually transmitted diseases.
- ★ Reproductive health care, such as maternity care, infertility, sexual problems, tubal ligation, urinary incontinence and others.
- ★ Rehabilitation services such as physical, occupational, speech-language, recreational, and vocational therapy.
- ★ Homebound and long-term care services.

Services for Special Groups:

- ★ Homeless women Veterans
- ★ Victims of domestic violence
- ★ Veterans interested in education, employment assistance, and vocational rehabilitation

Each facility has a Women Veterans Program Manager available to help you. In addition, there are Women Veterans Health Liaisons at all of the CBOCs.

While it is everyone's job to care for women Veterans, the Medical Director of the Women Veterans Program and Women Veterans Program Manager oversee the quality of health care you are provided and make sure you receive the care you deserve!

Reference:

www.womenshealth.va.gov

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Facts about Women in the Military

- ✓ Women have been playing a role in the U.S. Army since 1775.
- ✓ The population of women Veterans has increased from 1.1 million in 1980 to nearly 2 million today. Women Veterans are projected to be more than 10 percent of the Veteran population by 2020.
- ✓ Women currently make up more than 14.5% of active duty military, nearly 18% of Guard and Reserves, and nearly 6% of VA health care users.
- ✓ Women who were deployed and served in the recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq are enrolling in VA at unprecedented rates. Fifty-two percent of female OEF/OIF/OND Veterans have received VA health care.
- ✓ The number of women Veterans using VA care has doubled in the last decade. It went from nearly 160,000 in 2000 to 310,000 in 2010.

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Be Safe: Prevent Falls

Everyone is at risk for injuries related to falling, but older adults are even more at risk. Statistics show one in three adults age 65 and older fall each year. Falls are a concern because they can cause injuries (fractures of the hip, spine, arm, leg, pelvis, hand, or ankle) or even death. Women have a higher rate of fall-related fractures, but men are more likely to die from a fall.

It is easy to slip outside in the winter months. Here are some tips to stay safe outside:

- 👟 Walk with caution outside. Step carefully and slowly.
- 👟 Pay attention to where you are walking. Do not text or talk on the phone while walking.
- 👟 Wear shoes with good traction (no smooth soles).
- 👟 Make sure your sidewalk and driveway are shoveled.
- 👟 Use handrails when going up and down stairs.
- 👟 Use your arms for balance. Don't carry heavy loads while walking.

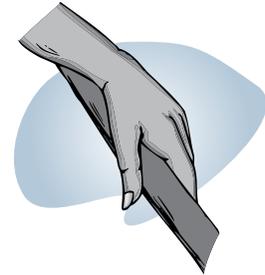


About half of all falls happen at home. There are many things you can do to make your home safer:

- 👟 If you must use rugs, use double-sided tape to keep the rugs from slipping.



- 👉 Install grab bars next to your toilet and in the tub or shower.
- 👉 Use non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors.
- 👉 Improve lighting. Hang curtains or shades to reduce glare.
- 👉 Wear shoes inside the house.
- 👉 Remove anything you could trip over from all the places where you walk.
- 👉 Install handrails and lights in staircases.
- 👉 Keep items you use often in cabinets you can reach without a step stool.
- 👉 Exercise regularly. Increasing your strength and balance will make you less likely to fall.



References:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/adultfalls.html> Accessed Oct 30, 2012

VHA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention – http://www.prevention.va.gov/Be_Safe.asp Accessed Oct 30, 2012

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It's Never too Late for the Flu Vaccine

Even healthy people can get the flu, and it can be serious.

Everyone 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine. **This means you.**

This season, protect yourself—and those around you—by getting a flu vaccine.

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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.

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Hines:	708-202-8387
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"Ask An Expert" Question or Idea for Future Articles

Do you have an "Ask An Expert" question or a suggestion for future topics for articles? 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:

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