



Great Lakes VA HEALTHVIEWS

The Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12

Volume 3, Issue 1

Spring 2005



Excess weight is more common in the veteran population than in the general U.S. population. The good news is modest weight loss can improve your health.

Extra weight can put you at higher risk for:

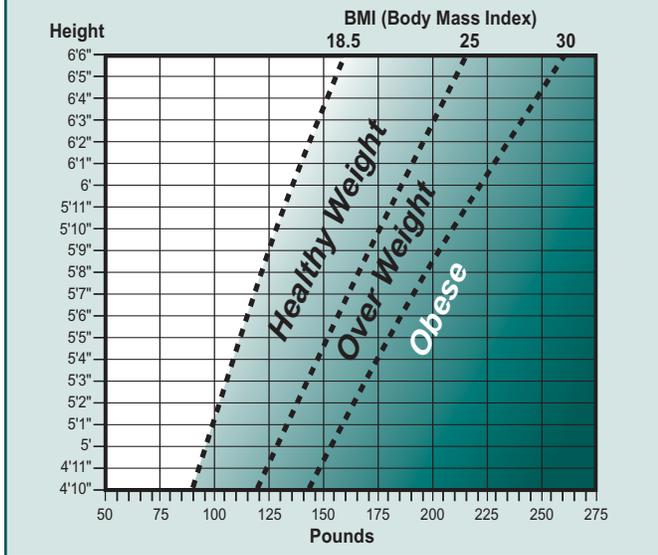
- Type 2 Diabetes
- High Blood Pressure
- Heart Disease and Stroke
- Sleep Apnea
- Osteoarthritis
- Gallbladder Disease
- Irregular periods

“My doctor told me I am no longer just overweight, now I am obese because my BMI is now over 30. What does that mean?”

Body mass index (BMI) is one way to tell whether you are at a healthy weight, are overweight, or are obese. It measures your weight in relation to your height. A BMI of 18.5 to 24.9 is in the healthy range.

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In the chart below, find your height in the left-hand column and move across the row to find your weight. If you are in the overweight or obese range on the chart, you are more likely to have certain health problems.



What can I do?

Talk to your provider. The VA is committed to your well-being and when we talk about your weight it's because we know it can affect your overall health. Weight gain can be very frustrating, but it is treatable. Your doctor will help you explore the causes of your weight gain, such as medication use, eating habits, lifestyle and medical conditions.

Start slow: Your health can be improved by a loss of 5-10 percent of your current weight.

Set goals:

- *Be Specific* – exercise is a great goal but go the extra step. What kind of exercise will you do? Are you going to walk the dog or swim? How many days a week and how long? Your health care team is willing to work with you on setting a goal.

- *Be Realistic* – start with what you are doing now and build on success! If you have not been active, going for a 5 mile jog is not realistic. Maybe a 10-minute walk in the beginning is something you can build on.
- *Be Forgiving* – we all have good and bad days. If you don't reach your goal, keep trying. Your health care team is there to support you! We all need a coach!

What can the VA offer to help me lose weight?

The VA has a wide variety of services to help you meet your health goals. Your primary care provider can arrange for visits with a registered dietitian, a physical therapist, a behavioral therapist and, if needed, surgical intervention.

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HOME CARE CORNER



What's New with My HealtheVet?

Deb Bates RN,
Patient Education Coordinator
Iron Mountain VAMC

My HealtheVet is a computer website for veterans, their families and caregivers. VA employees and providers can also use the site. It provides health information you can depend on. It also has tools you can use to make the most of your visit with your provider.

Phase 1 of MyHealtheVet began on Veteran's Day 2003. At that time it contained health information, risk assessment tools, and VA news and information.

Phase 2 began on Veteran's Day 2004 with an updated registration process and a new look. Now you can:

- Record and track personal information, such as emergency contacts, and health insurance information
- Record and track your health readings, such as blood pressure or blood sugar, cholesterol, heart rate, weight and pain

The rest of Phase 2 is due to be completed this spring! When it's completed you will be able to:

- Refill prescriptions online
- View upcoming appointments
- View co-payment balances

For more information take the Virtual Tour at <http://www.myhealth.va.gov/>

Source: Health Informatics Strategy, VHA Office of Information

Is Your Weight Tied To Your Emotions?

Gail Beauchamp CSW, CACII, ICADC
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Iron Mountain VAMC

We pay a lot of attention to being thin. Sometimes the more we try to be thin, the more overweight we become. One-third of us weigh 20 percent more than the recommended weight for our height, and these numbers keep rising.

People who are obese may also have depression. As unfair as it is, the way other people think about and act toward a person who is obese may make the person feel bad about themselves. This may be the cause of low self-esteem and depression.



What are the Signs of Depression?

- Feeling sad all the time
- Thoughts like “I’m no good,” “No one cares about me”
- Feeling tired all the time
- Crying spells
- Trouble making decisions
- Problems with sleep
- Eating too much or too little
- Wanting to spend too much time alone
- Thoughts about hurting yourself or other people
- Things that used to be fun aren’t anymore
- No energy to do day to day tasks that need to be done

A Healthy Approach

Until science can unravel the link between depression and obesity, a good approach is to focus on healthy living. Obese people who use this approach have improved their mood and self-esteem. Choose a balanced food plan and get more active. You can enjoy life even though you do not fit the American ideal in body size!

Suggestions for Healthy Food Choices

Change from ----- To

Regular Sodas	Diet Sodas
Sweetened Tea	Unsweetened Tea (may use artificial sweetener)
Fried Chicken	Baked, Skinless Chicken
White Bread	Whole Wheat Bread
Buttered Popcorn	Low Fat Popcorn
Ground Beef	Ground Turkey Meat (less than 10% fat)
Fried Corn or Potato Chips	Baked Chips
Whole or 2% Milk	Skim or 1% Milk
No Water	Drink It! Aim for 6-8 glasses each day

Easy Ways to Increase Your Activity

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator
- Wash your car instead of taking it to a car wash
- Hide your TV remote; get up and walk to change the channel
- Park at the far end of the parking lot
- Walk your dog
- Move while talking on the phone
- Walk to your neighbor's house instead of calling

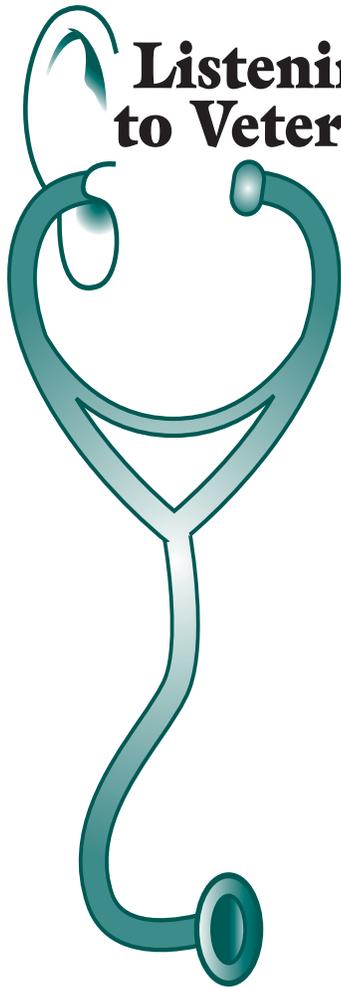
To get help for depression, call your nearest VA and ask for the Mental Health Services. Your VA dietitian can help with a healthy eating plan. Talk to your provider about increasing your activity.

Sources:

Dept. of Health and Human Services Center for Disease Control. Obesity and Depression. (n.d.). Retrieved November 23, 2004, from www.cdc.gov

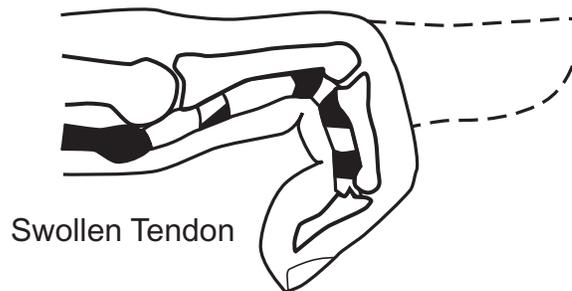
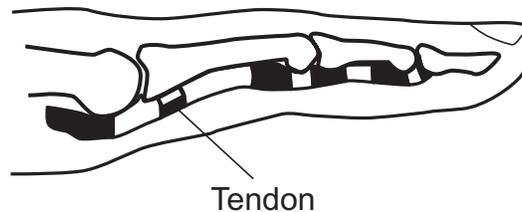
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MOVE program, Managing Overweight/Obesity For Veterans Everywhere. VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention.



“My thumb and pointing finger stiffen and lock up towards each other. Some call it trigger finger. What is it and what are some remedies?”

A common problem that causes catching or locking of a finger or thumb joint is known as “trigger finger.” It is caused by swelling in the tendon that helps the finger to move. The swollen tendon “catches” as it glides through tendon tunnels in the finger and causes pain. The finger then often springs free as the tendon pops through the tunnel. This is the ‘trigger’ motion.



Symptoms of trigger finger include pain and swelling where the finger or thumb meets the palm. Repetitive movements like using tools or typing can cause this swelling. Having arthritis or a hand injury can also cause trigger finger.

If you suspect you have trigger finger, you can help yourself by:

- decreasing or stopping any repetitive motions
- using an ice pack or soaking the hand in cold water for 15 minutes at a time, three times a day.
- taking over-the-counter pain medicines, such as Motrin or Advil (if allowed by your doctor)

If the pain continues after a week of self-treatment, you should contact your doctor.

Your doctor may prescribe medicine, a splint and rest for a mild case of trigger finger. A more serious case may involve injections of medicine into the tendon. Injections usually work well to decrease the symptoms. The doctor often suggests a rest period for a day or two afterward. In some cases, a second shot may be needed.

Surgery, if needed, is about a 20-minute procedure and usually has very good results. The doctor will cut a small opening in the tendon tunnel to allow smoother movement through the tunnel. After surgery the hand is often stiff and swollen. You can return to normal activities and work after 2-4 weeks. The doctor may also prescribe physical therapy.

Physical therapy will help return proper movement and strength to the finger and reduces swelling. The physical therapist will also teach you how to prevent future problems.

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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 through the VISN 12 internet site at <http://www.visn12.med.va.gov>

Click on the *Services for Veterans* button, then click on the *Veterans' Wellness* section.



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
Madison:	608-256-1901
Milwaukee:	1-888-469-6614
North Chicago:	1-800-393-0865
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**“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 on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). JCAHO 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 JCAHO. You may request a “public information interview.” Requests should be made in writing to:

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