



Great Lakes VA HEALTHVIEWS

The Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12

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Sexual Trauma and Military Service

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A recent study done by the VA found that 30% of female veterans were raped or experienced an attempted rape during active duty. Among women veteran patients, 23% reported having had at least one sexual assault while in the military. 55% reported some form of sexual harassment while in the service. Also, data from about 1.7 million male and female VA patients showed that about 22% of women and 1% of men reported some type of military sexual trauma.

The sad truth is that women who enter the military are at high risk of sexual harassment or sexual assault. The military is a dangerous workplace, even for troops who are not stationed in a war zone. Male and female soldiers can be victims of sexual misconduct. Some service members do seek medical and psychiatric help when they are victims of sexual misconduct. Some report their experience to their superiors. But many sexual crimes go

unreported. These victims go without the treatment that is needed for their complete recovery.

Once a service member is discharged from the military, the last thing they may want to do is get help for a sexual trauma that occurred during their military service. Most people just want to get on with their lives. Unfortunately, they often have symptoms that interfere with their health and quality of life.

(continued on page 2)

Most people do not have all of these symptoms. But even if you have only a few, you may want to get help.

- being embarrassed or not willing to talk about the assault
- feelings of discomfort that make it hard to remember the event
- avoiding people, places, or objects associated with the assault
- a sense that something just doesn't feel right
- increased use of alcohol or drugs
- suicidal thoughts
- recurring dreams and/or thoughts of the assault
- physical health problems, for example headaches, stomach pain, muscle pain
- stomach/intestine or gynecological (female) problems
- problems relating with others because of a need to avoid people, irritability, or mistrust
- difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- nightmares
- feeling "emotionally numb"
- loss of interest in activities
- a general increase in fear/anxiety
- not able to concentrate
- being overly alert or watchful
- being hopeless or tearful
- loss of appetite or uncontrollable overeating
- constant tiredness

These symptoms may decrease over time. But, it is common for someone who has been a victim of sexual trauma to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a more prolonged reaction to trauma. It may occur if the symptoms are not treated right away. PTSD can show up as soon as 3 months after the trauma or many years later.

The VA has a variety of treatments to help victims of sexual trauma. You will be seen by a specially trained VA health care provider. This provider understands the effects of sexual trauma and the impact it can have on a person's physical and mental health.

Treatment for PTSD can be provided in a clinic or hospital. It may involve individual counseling, group support or medicine. The goals of treatment for sexual trauma are to:

- help you better understand your reaction to trauma.
- allow you to share experiences with others with similar problems.
- teach you to better cope with painful memories, emotions, and problems.
- help you tackle trauma-related problems, such as an eating disorder, substance abuse, or depression.
- reduce social isolation.
- improve family relationships.

RememberDespite the upsetting and terrifying nature of these experiences, victims of sexual trauma can be successfully treated and can resume a satisfying and productive life.

Each VA Medical Center has a coordinator whose job is to help veterans get care for sexual trauma experienced during their military service. The VISN 12 coordinators are:

Hines	Diane Shearod, LCSW	708 202-2075
Iron Mountain	Barbara Nurenberg, CSW, CAC2	906 774-3300, ext. 31281
Jesse Brown	Jill Feldman, PhD, LCSW	312 569-6218
Madison	Elizabeth Winston, PhD	608 256-1901, ext. 11857
Milwaukee	Mitzi Dearborn, PhD	414 384-2000, ext. 41674
North Chicago	Barb Pack, LCSW	847 688-1900, ext. 85799
Tomah	Susan Durbin, MSW	608 372-3971, ext. 66035

Sources:

Sadler, Booth, Cook, and Doebbling. Factors Associated with Women’s Risk of Rape in the Military Environment. American Journal of Industrial Medicine. 34 (2003): 262-273.

Katherine Skinner, PhD, Center for Health Quality, Outcomes and Economic Research; Joan Furey, Former Director, Center for Women Veterans; Erica Sharkansky, PhD, National Center for PTSD, Women’s Health Sciences Division, Boston. “Health Status of Women Veterans Using Department of Veterans Affairs Ambulatory Care Services: Implications for VA Health Care”. (2000) Retrieved from <http://vaww.appc1.va.gov/mst>.



A Women Veterans Program Manager is available at each Medical Center to help with health care issues:

Hines	Diane Shearod, LCSW	708 202-2075
Iron Mountain	Julie Wright, MSW	906 774-3300, ext. 32388
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Tomah	Gwendolyn Boyd, PA-C	608 372-3971, ext. 66189

Sexual Assault: How To Protect Yourself

Kathy Breunig, RN, MN, ANP
Women Veterans Program Manager
Zablocki VA Medical Center, Milwaukee

As you enjoy your outdoor activities this summer, keep in mind the things you can do to reduce your chance of being sexually assaulted.

- Be aware of your surroundings. Know who's out there and what's going on.
- Walk with confidence. The more confident you look, the stronger you appear.
- Don't let drugs or alcohol affect your judgment.
- Be assertive. Don't let anyone violate your space.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable in your surroundings, leave.
- Don't prop open self-locking doors.
- Lock your doors and windows, even if you leave your house for just a few minutes.
- Watch your keys. Don't lend them. Don't leave them. Don't lose them. And don't put your name and address on the key ring.
- Watch out for unwanted visitors. Know who's on the other side of the door before you open it.
- Avoid isolated spots, like underground garages, offices after business hours and apartment laundry rooms.
- Avoid walking or jogging alone, especially at night. Vary your route. Stay in well-traveled, well-lit areas.
- Have your key ready to use before you reach the door of home, car, or work.
- Park in well-lit areas and lock the car, even if you'll only be gone a few minutes.
- Drive on busy streets, with doors and windows locked.
- Never hitchhike or pick up a hitchhiker.
- Keep your car in good shape with plenty of gas in the tank.
- If you have car trouble, call for help on your cell phone. If you don't have a phone, put the hood up, lock the doors and put a banner in the rear window that says, "Help. Call Police."

Source:
National Crime Prevention Council
Phone 202-466-6272
<http://www.ncpc.org> April 2005

HOME CARE CORNER

Domestic Violence: It Can Be Stopped!

Diane Shearod, LCSW, Hines VA Women Veterans Program Manager
Gail Gunter Hunt, LCSW, Madison VA Women Veterans Program Manager

Domestic violence is a pattern of physical and psychological abuse. It includes threats, intimidation, isolation or economic threats. One person uses it to exert power and control over another in a dating, family or household relationship. It cuts across all racial, ethnic, religious, age, occupational and socioeconomic lines. You or someone you know may be a victim. Most victims are women, although men can also be victims.

Common Warning Signs of Domestic Violence

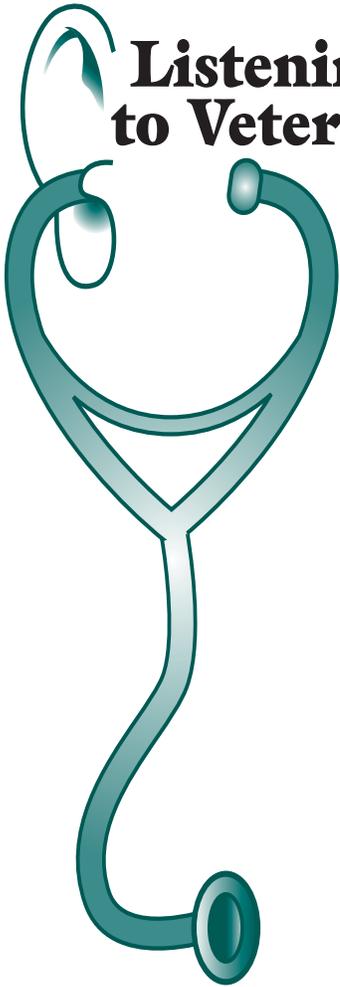
Domestic violence can be deadly. It is important to talk to someone, such as a family member, friend, minister, doctor, social worker, or Women Veterans Program Manager. There are community programs that can help. Does your partner:

- Intimidate you with looks, threats or actions?
- Prevent or make it difficult for you to see friends or relatives?
- Call you names or continually put you down?
- Hit, shake, or slap you?

An abused woman should develop a safety plan which includes keeping extra keys, money, phone numbers, and documents (birth certificates, passports, bankbooks, insurance papers) in a safe place. Have an escape route and place to run to. In some cases, leaving can put you at even greater risk. Talk to someone who can help with this decision.

An abused woman in immediate danger to herself or her children should leave and call the police. After leaving, she should make sure her home is secure, tell schools about custody arrangements, and get legal help. She should also consider getting an order of protection.

Ask for help! Domestic violence can be stopped!



**I just found out I have
osteoporosis.
Now what can I do?**

Osteoporosis is a disease that causes your bones to become thin and weak. It occurs mostly in women after menopause. But it can also happen to men. As bones weaken, they can be more easily broken. Your healthcare provider may have prescribed medicine for you. You can also learn how to prevent further bone loss and protect yourself from injury.

**Increase Calcium In
Your Diet**

- Women aged 25 years to menopause need 1,000 to 1,200 mg daily.
- Menopausal women and any woman over age 65 needs 1,500 mg daily.

Good sources of calcium include nonfat milk and low fat yogurt, sardines and salmon (canned with the bones), dried cooked beans, macaroni and cheese, kale, broccoli, tofu, oranges, and wheat bread.



Get Some Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps control how much calcium is absorbed from food. It is made in the skin when exposed to ultraviolet light. Try to get 30-60 minutes of sunshine a day. The recommended dose of Vitamin D is 400-800 IU (international units). Many foods are now fortified with vitamin D. But remember that too much vitamin D can be harmful. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have any questions about how much Vitamin D to take.

Do Weight-Bearing Exercises

Weight-bearing activity keeps muscles strong and limber. It can also decrease the risk of falling. Weight-bearing exercise can be as simple as walking. Remember - staying active plays a big part in maintaining bone mass no matter what your age.

Changes to Make at Home

- Wear sturdy, low-heeled, soft-soled shoes. Avoid floppy slippers and sandals.
- Ask your doctor whether any medicine you are taking can cause dizziness.
- Reduce clutter throughout the house.
- Don't use small throw rugs that can slip and slide. Secure all rugs.
- Remove all loose wires and electrical cords that can cause tripping.
- Be sure staircases have treads and handrails.
- Keep halls, stairs and entryways well lighted.
- Use nightlights in the bedroom and bathroom.
- Use grab bars and non-skid tape in the shower or tub.
- Use non-skid rubber mats near the kitchen sink and stove.
- Don't use slippery waxes. Watch out for wet floors. Clean up spills right away.
- When driving, wear seat belts and adjust your seat properly.
- Keep your use of alcohol to a minimum.

Following this advice can help you live a longer, healthier life.

Source: The National Osteoporosis Foundation.

Answered by:
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Your best source for information on your health will always be your doctor or health care provider. We hope this newsletter will encourage you to talk to your health care provider and ask questions about your health concerns.

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**“Ask An Expert” Question
or Idea for Future Articles**

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<http://www.visn12.med.va.gov>

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