

VETERANS' ADVANTAGE

Winter 2000

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE

FOR NEW YORK /

NEW JERSEY VETERANS

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A century of veterans

As we bid farewell to the 20th century and greet the new millennium, it is important that we take a moment to reflect on what we do day in and day out in the VA New York/New Jersey Veterans Healthcare System. While the century just passed will be remembered for the advances in technology, the race to the moon and the elimination of certain diseases, certainly the wars we fought and the conflicts we avoided will also mark its significance.

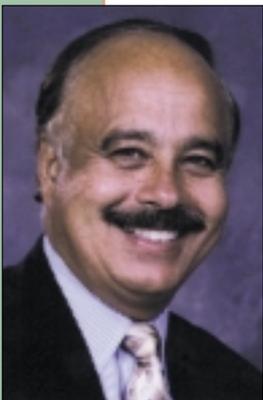
Indeed, the last 100 years have been a remarkable testimony to the strength of our democracy and the lengths that we, as a nation, will go in order to defend it here and around the world. And it has been our servicemen and servicewomen who have been defending our democracy and the American way.

If technology advanced, it was because our scientists were free to pursue their passions. If disease was eradicated, it was because researchers were able, unfettered, to reach new heights only dreamed of in other times. If we made it to the moon, it was because all eyes were upon us, the strongest, most talented nation in the world, to achieve this measure of success.

In our Network 3 medical centers, several World War I veterans are approaching or are older than 100 years old. These men have seen the entire century. As young men they were called to arms to battle a foe in a war unlike any war before. Many people in our Network medical centers are World War II veterans who at mid-century put on a uniform

and fought the enemy on many fronts. These are men and women who sacrificed everything for their country. In our Network there are Korean and Vietnam veterans who laid down personal dreams and desires to help ensure that democracy would survive elsewhere in the world. And in our medical centers are men and women who served in the Gulf, Beirut, Kosovo and nearly every other part of the globe, during peacetime and war, standing firm for freedom.

Now that the century has drawn to a close, we must realize that it was the century of soldiers, the century of veterans. As employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs we have the most unique privilege of serving the men and women who gave us America's 20th century. Let's make an effort to say thank you to each and every veteran we serve in the new year.



James J. Farsetta, FACHE
Network Director

<http://www.va.gov/visns/visn03>

We're just a phone call away

Do you have questions about your health? Do you need information about medication dosages, undelivered mail prescriptions or prescription interactions? Day or night, you can get answers to all your healthcare questions by calling the VA Nurses Helpline, 24 hours a day, at 1-800-877-6976.

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Miss America visits VA



Miss America 2000, Heather Renee French, at the New York (Manhattan) VA Medical Center, addresses veterans from New York and New Jersey as she spotlights her mission to raise awareness of the nation's homeless veterans.



VA NY/NJ Veterans Health Care Network staff and patients with Miss America

Heather Renee French, Miss America 2000 from Kentucky, hosted the Make a Difference Day ceremony for the VA New York/New Jersey Health Care Network Homeless Veterans Program at the New York Harbor VA Health Care System. The ceremony was held at the Manhattan VA Campus last October.

Ms. French's mission during her reign as Miss America is to spotlight the needs of homeless veterans. Her father is a disabled Vietnam veteran who had a tremendous impact on her life. She is dedicating her Miss America crown to him and honoring him by working on behalf of veterans. She told the gathered crowd of her fond remembrances of volunteering in a VA hospital in

VA Homeless Programs as services that truly make a difference in veterans' lives.

The Make a Difference Day ceremony was designed to celebrate homeless veterans' successful transition to independent community living with the help of NY/NJ Network 3 Homeless Programs. The VA Veterans Homeless Pro-

gram graduates were honored with awards and the opportunity to ask Miss America questions following her remarks on the importance of establishing positive impressions during typical interactions in day-to-day living.

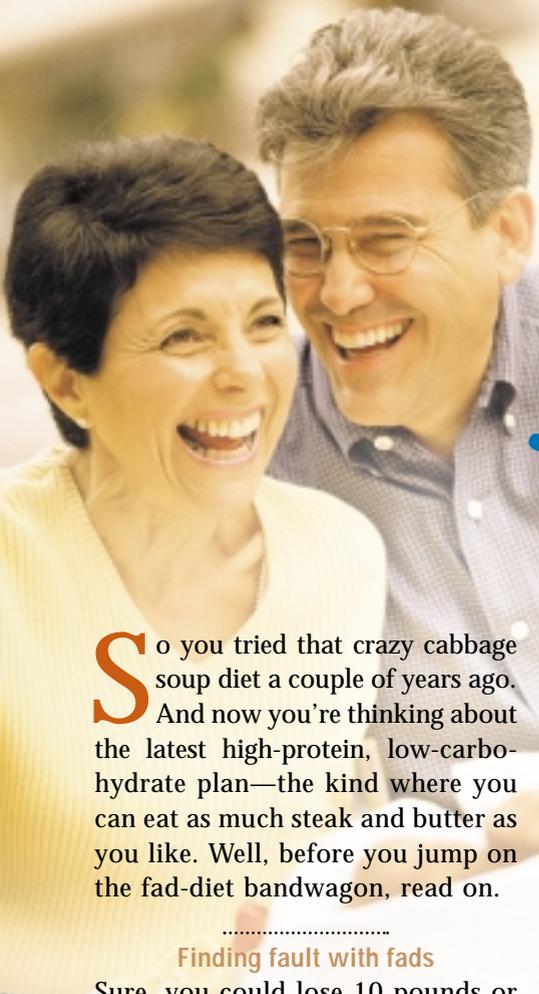
VA homelessness experts and clinicians discussed the homeless veteran issue in the New York and New Jersey area and the significant outreach being done by VA to this important population.

Make a Difference Day is one of the most encompassing national days of helping. Created by *USA Weekend*, it is an annual event.

If you know of a homeless veteran, the VA can help with outreach, information, counseling, treatment and referrals. Call the VA New York/New Jersey Homeless Veterans Hotline at **1-888-725-3000**, or contact your nearest VA Medical Center/Clinic listed on the back page. ■



Charles Gabrielson, right, publisher of *USA Weekend*, sponsor of Make a Difference Day, with Miss America and James J. Farsetta, VISN 3 network director



Sensible strategies for reaching *your* healthy weight

So you tried that crazy cabbage soup diet a couple of years ago. And now you're thinking about the latest high-protein, low-carbohydrate plan—the kind where you can eat as much steak and butter as you like. Well, before you jump on the fad-diet bandwagon, read on.

Finding fault with fads

Sure, you could lose 10 pounds or more on a fad diet, but most of it will be water—or lean muscle mass. And in the end, you won't have learned much to help you eat smart for the rest of your life—the key to permanent weight loss.

One step at a time

What's the answer? First, be prepared for slow, steady weight loss. Losing up to two pounds a week really is the best way to keep fat off.

Second, choose a realistic weight goal. Losing just 10 percent of your body weight can make a big difference in your health and the way you feel and look. Setting several mini-goals can help you reach a big goal more easily.

Third, figure out how many calories you can eat each day to lose a pound a week. To do that, multiply your current body weight by 10. For example, a 220-pound

man can eat about 2,200 calories a day and still lose weight.

Bargain hunting

Just like the money in your wallet, spend your calorie budget wisely. For example, 2,200 calories a day may sound generous—until you “buy” a few doughnuts and realize you've only got 1,300 calories left. Your best bet: Shop for bargain foods—low-calorie, complex carbohydrates (vegetables, fruits and whole grains)—that satisfy you without blowing your budget. (Hint: increasing your physical activity will give you more calories to spend.)

Try to budget about 60 percent of your calories for carbohydrates, another 10 percent to 15 percent for protein (opt for lean meats, skinless poultry, fish and soy products) and the rest (no more than 30 percent) for fat.

Cut the fat

At 9 calories a gram, fat packs more than twice the calories of protein and carbohydrates, each of which provide just 4 calories a gram. Try these tips to trim the fat

from your diet:

- Remove fat and skin from meat.
- Use broth instead of oil or butter to sauté.
- Switch to low-fat dairy products—1 percent or skim milk; non-fat yogurt, sour cream and ice cream; and low-fat cheese.
- Use nonfat or reduced-fat mayonnaise and salad dressings.
- Avoid products that contain coconut oil, palm oil and other hydrogenated oils.

Check your attitude

For many of us, eating fulfills an emotional as well as a physical need. It may help to ask yourself a few questions before you take a bite: Am I really hungry? Am I full or nearly full?

Do you tend to eat while standing in front of the refrigerator? If so, make a vow to eat only when sitting at a dining table—with the TV off!

Finally, if you usually approach eating as if it were a race to the finish, try savoring your meal. Put your fork down between bites and have a sip of water. ■



**DON'T RUSH IT—
SLOW AND STEADY
ARE THE KEYS
TO SUCCESSFUL
WEIGHT LOSS.**

Each of VISN 3's medical centers has weight-loss specialists and nutritional counselors. Contact your nearest NY/NJ VA facility (listed on the back page) today!

Keeping bones stronger longer



Contrary to popular belief, bones aren't hard, white, lifeless structures. They're flexible, growing tissues that maintain themselves through a process called remodeling, in which old bone is removed and new bone is added. Until about age 35, more bone is added than removed, but after age 35, bone is lost faster than it is replaced.

In osteoporosis, however, bone

mass is lost at a dangerously rapid rate, causing brittle bones that break easily. When that happens, an everyday activity such as stepping off a curb, bending down to pick up a newspaper or even coughing can cause a fracture. The wrist, spine and hips are at greatest risk.

VA clinicians tell us that over time, the vertebrae in the spine may collapse, causing a dowager's hump. Other signs of advanced osteoporosis include height or tooth loss, breathing problems and back, rib and abdominal pain.

Fortunately, simple screening tests are available to let women know if they are at high risk for the disease or already have it. (Ask your VA healthcare provider for information on screening through the VA.)

Listed below are some of the preventive and treatment options available for bone-loss problems.

- **Hormone replacement therapy (HRT).** HRT not only slows bone damage but also helps rebuild bone.

- **Alendronate.** This non-hormonal medication can

prevent bone loss as well as rebuild bone.

- **Calcitonin.** A synthetic hormone that can be taken either by nasal spray or by injection, calcitonin stops bone loss in the spine and relieves related pain.

- **Raloxifene.** Raloxifene mimics the way estrogen works in the body to protect bones.

In addition, all women can protect their bone health by including adequate amounts of calcium and vitamin D in their diets (ask your healthcare provider about recommended amounts); doing weight-bearing exercises such as walking or stair-climbing; and quitting smoking. ■

Are you at risk?

You may be if you ...

- have gone through an early menopause (before reaching your late 40s)
- have a close relative who has developed the disease
- are white or Asian
- are thin and small-boned
- don't exercise
- don't get enough calcium
- consume three or more alcoholic drinks a day
- smoke cigarettes



If you feel you may be at risk, contact your VA healthcare provider today to discuss preventive measures you can begin right away. VA healthcare centers are listed on the back page of this newsletter.

Get tested

The VA New York Harbor Health Care System has recently added a bone densitometer to its diagnostic arsenal. Bone density tests help physicians determine calcium loss to bones, a frequent cause of fractures in the elderly.



Protect yourself from colon cancer

Normally, colon cancer doesn't get talked about much. Yet it's the second biggest cancer killer after lung cancer. But here's some news worth spreading: You can take concrete steps to prevent colon cancer. At the very least, you should make early detection a priority. Our VA specialists have found that if caught in a localized stage, the five-year survival rate for the disease is 91 percent.

An active approach

Paying attention to these areas can cut your risk of colon cancer—and improve your overall health:

Cut the fat and boost the fiber. Evidence points to a high-fat, low-fiber diet as a factor in colon cancer. So if most of your meals center around red meat, cheese and other high-fat fare, you're due for a change. Start piling more cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, brus-

sels sprouts, cabbage and other vegetables named for the cross shape within their flowers), legumes (dried peas and beans), fruits and whole grains on your plate. (But be aware that if they're coated with butter or cream sauce, even vegetables can turn into a nutritional nightmare.) Contact your VA healthcare provider for more information.

Fiber helps by keeping the digestive process moving so cancer-causing wastes spend less time in the bowel.

Get off the couch. Studies suggest taking a 20-minute walk three times a week can lower colon cancer risk.

Limit alcohol. Drinking more than two drinks a day seems to raise your risk of colon cancer by disrupting the body's use of a chemical compound that thwarts cancer-causing genes.

Stop smoking. The habit plays a role in 30 percent of all cancers. So if you're still lighting up, quit!

Women, consider hormone replacement therapy if you are postmenopausal.

Recent studies suggest HRT may reduce colon cancer risk.

Benefiting from early detection

This three-part screening program can help ensure early detection of abnormal growths that may lead to colon cancer if left untreated:

A digital rectal examination (DRE) by a physician. During this test, your doctor inserts a lubricated, gloved finger into the rectum and feels for abnormal areas. DREs should be performed annually after age 40.

A stool blood test (also called a fecal occult blood test) should be performed annually after age 50. In this test, a small stool sample is analyzed for hidden blood.

A sigmoidoscopy is recommended every three to five years starting at age 50. During this procedure, the doctor inserts a hollow, lighted tube through the anus to inspect the rectum and lower colon.

If the tests reveal any problems, your VA physician may recommend additional tests. If you're at high risk for the cancer, your doctor may recommend a different screening schedule. ■

Don't ignore these symptoms

Tell your VA healthcare provider if you notice the following:

- rectal bleeding
- blood in the stool
- any change in bowel habits
- a feeling that the bowel does not empty completely
- unexplained weight loss
- fatigue

Diversity is a priority

Bronx VA Medical Center was recently chosen as a finalist for the VA's National Annual Diversity Award, a competitive national award given to the VA facility that best demonstrates the will, wherewithal and foresight to fully embrace the totality of its human resources.



Francine Fraser, Alberto Murray, Norma Brown and James J. Farsetta

Alberto Murray (New York Harbor VA) and Norma Brown (Bronx VA) received the Center for

Minority Veterans Award for "Exceptional Performance in the Minority Veterans Program." Only 10 of these awards were given nationwide. VISN 3 is especially honored to have two recipients. ■

Mental health screening in NY/NJ VA Medical Centers

We often think of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and substance abuse as disorders that require the care of a mental health professional. In fact, most people who suffer these problems never visit a psychiatrist or psychologist. Instead, they are often treated by their primary care providers.

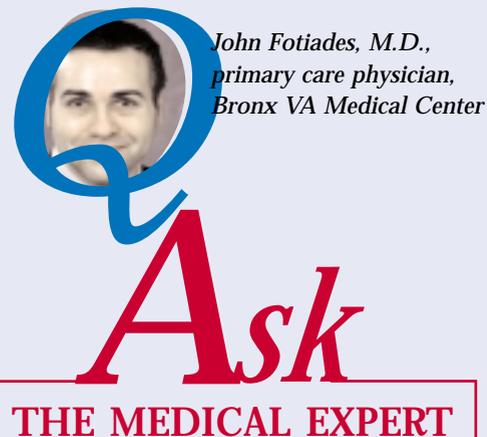
The trouble is many veterans never report symptoms of PTSD, depression or problems with substance abuse to their primary care physicians. Instead, they may complain of related physical symptoms like headache, chest pain, stomach pain and insomnia.

That's why our network of VA Medical Centers has been offering educational programs that teach primary care providers how to recognize and manage mental health disorders. All patients seen

in our medical centers will be screened for depression, PTSD, anxiety and substance abuse, and if necessary, appropriate treatment will be offered.

Says a primary care provider who recently completed the program, "I once had a World War II vet who often woke up in the middle of the night drenched in sweat. When I diagnosed him with PTSD, he told me he never realized what a problem it was until he received treatment. The first night he was able to sleep peacefully he felt like a new man and was very appreciative to the VA for the help he received." Hopefully, VA's educational programs will result in many more such success stories.

This information is brought to you as a service of Mental Illness and Education Clinical Center. ■



Q: What can I do to relieve chapped, cracked hands in winter?

A: The problem you describe is a common winter woe. It's caused by the loss of moisture from the skin's surface, leaving skin dry. The dry skin then becomes more susceptible to damage from the cold, resulting in painful cracks. When this occurs, ask your VA doctor to prescribe a cortisone cream. The cream is safe and should provide almost immediate comfort. You can prevent the condition from recurring simply by applying moisturizer to the affected area throughout the day and by wearing gloves whenever you're outside in the cold.

Q: During the winter I become very depressed. My friends say it's a case of the holiday blues, but I don't feel better until spring. Could light treatments help me?

A: The condition you describe is known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD) and is most common in winter. Although many experts believe SAD is directly related to the degree of sunlight exposure a person receives, there have been no definitive studies showing light therapy to be an effective remedy.

Many patients who suffer from SAD actually have some form of depression that improves dramatically with treatment. I would suggest seeing your VA primary care provider and undergoing a simple screening for depression. Your physician can offer several effective treatment options. ■

Send your questions about staying healthy to Ask the Medical Expert, VA VISN 3, 130 W. Kingsbridge Road, Bronx, NY 10468.

Where YOU CAN FIND US—ANYTIME

Bronx

Medical Center:

130 West Kingsbridge Road
Bronx, NY 10468
(718) 584-9000

Community Clinics:

23 South Broadway
White Plains, NY 10601
(914) 421-1951

118 New Main Street
Yonkers, NY 10705
(914) 375-8055

12 N. Seventh Avenue, Rm. 365
Mount Vernon, NY 10550
(914) 664-8000, ext. 2612

VA NY Harbor

Health Care System

Medical Centers:

Brooklyn Campus
800 Poly Place
Brooklyn, NY 11209
(718) 836-6600

New York Campus
423 East 23rd Street
New York, NY 10010
(212) 686-7500

VA Primary and
Extended Care Center

179th Street & Linden Boulevard
St. Albans, NY 11425
(718) 526-1000

Community Clinics:

40 Flatbush Extension—8th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11201
(718) 439-4300

21 Water Street
Staten Island, NY 10301
(718) 630-3550

55 West 125th Street—11th Floor
New York, NY 10027
(212) 828-5265

245 West Houston Street
New York, NY 10014
(212) 337-2569

VA New Jersey

Health Care System

Medical Centers:

East Orange Campus
385 Tremont Avenue
East Orange, NJ 07018-1095
(973) 676-1000

Lyons Campus
151 Knollcroft Road
Lyons, NJ 07939
(908) 647-0180

Community Clinics:

970 Route 70
Brick, NJ 08724
(732) 206-8900

654 East Jersey Street—
Second Floor
Elizabeth, NJ 07206
(908) 994-0120

171 Jersey Street—Building 36
Trenton, NJ 08611-2425
(609) 989-2355

385 Prospect Avenue
Hackensack, NJ 07601
(201) 487-1390

115 Christopher Columbus Drive
Jersey City, NJ 07302
(201) 435-3055

317 George Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
(732) 729-9555

VA Hudson Valley

Health Care System

Medical Centers:

Montrose Campus
Route 9A/P.O. Box 100
Montrose, NY 10548-0100
(914) 737-4400

Castle Point Campus
Castle Point, NY 12511
(914) 831-2000

Community Clinics:

Community General Hospital of
Sullivan County
Bushville Road
Harris, NY 12472
(914) 791-1137

150 Pike Street
Port Jervis, NY 12771
(914) 856-5396

20 Squadron Boulevard
New City, NY 10970
(914) 634-8942

110 Crystal Run Road
Middletown, NY 10949
(914) 692-0551

22 Freedom Plains Road
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603
(914) 452-5151

63 Hurley Avenue
Kingston, NY 12401
(914) 331-8322

65 Gleneida Avenue
Carmel, NY 10512
(914) 228-5291

Somers Professional Commons
Route 100
Somers, NY 10589
(914) 277-3418

63 Hurley Avenue
Kingston, NY 12401
(914) 331-8322

VA Mobile Clinic
Call 1-800-269-8749

Northport (Long Island)

Medical Center:

79 Middleville Road
Northport, NY 11768
(516) 261-4400

Mental Health Clinics:

235 Merrick Road
Lynbrook, NY 11563
(516) 887-3666
(Mon. & Thurs. only)

89 Hubbard Avenue
Riverhead, NY 11901
(516) 727-7171 (Thurs. only)

560 N. Delaware Avenue
Lindenhurst, NY 11757
(516) 884-1133 (Tues. only)

39 Nassau Avenue
Islip, NY 11751
(516) 581-5330 (Wed. only)

269 Baker Street &
S. Ocean Avenue
Patchogue, NY 11772
(516) 475-6610
(Tues. & Fri. only)

Mt. Sinai Community Center
North Country Road
Mt. Sinai, NY 11766
(516) 473-4068 (Mon. only)

1535 Old Country Rd.
Plainview, NY 11803

Mental Health Component:
(516) 572-8567
(Wed. & Fri. only)

Primary Care Component:
(516) 694-6008 (Mon.–Fri.)

400 Lakeland Avenue
Sayville, NY 11782
(516) 563-1105
(Thurs. only)

NY/NJ Veterans Integrated Service
Network 3
130 W. Kingsbridge Road
VISN Office
Bronx, NY 10468

<http://www.va.gov/visns/visn03>

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