

Veterans' Health

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

SPECIAL

Clip the checkout worksheet on page 7 to make the most of your next exam.

SPRING • 1999

What You Should Know About Diabetes

- Recognizing the symptoms
- Monitoring your progress
- Eating for good control

Hepatitis C: Are You At Risk?

You and Your Doctor

Help your VA healthcare provider treat you right

VA Healthcare System of Ohio



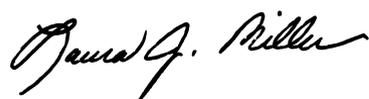
Take Advantage Of VA Healthcare— Close To Home

I'm so glad you're taking time out to enjoy this issue of *Veterans' Health*. I'm also pleased to be able to share some valuable information: The next time you need a checkup, have a sore throat or require a flu shot, you can just visit the VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) closest to your home (call Tele-Nurse at **1-888-VET-OHIO** or see back cover for locations). For most veterans, that's much easier than making a trip to a VA Medical Center.

So I'd like to encourage all of you to take advantage of CBOCs' convenience and high-quality care. The experienced medical staffs there can attend to your basic healthcare needs, including regular checkups, blood tests and blood pressure checks. They can also help you take charge of a chronic disease, such as diabetes (see pages 4-6 for more), or provide follow-up care after you've been hospitalized. In many cases, CBOCs can even provide you with a supply of start-up medications. If necessary, your primary care provider will refer you to the nearby VA Medical Center Campus for any advanced procedures. (If you are experiencing emergency symptoms, go to the nearest VA emergency room; **do not** go to a CBOC.)

Another nice thing about your nearby CBOC is that it will be easier for you to get to know your primary care provider (turn to page 7). You can make regular appointments at your convenience.

I'm sure that you will find CBOCs a good place to turn when you need medical attention.



—Laura J. Miller
Network Director

Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 22 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through the VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of the VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

ON THE COVER: Ohio Vietnam veteran Richard Camp eats healthy to stay healthy. Mr. Camp served 26 years in the Marine Corps and now works for the Lakota District Schools just north of Cincinnati. Be sure to read his book, *Lima 6*.

PHOTOGRAPHER: MARK ARLINGHAUS, MEDICAL MEDIA DEPARTMENT, CINCINNATI CAMPUS

Veterans' Health Editorial Directors

Suzanne Tate
Cincinnati VA Campus

Thomas Mattice
VA Healthcare System
of Ohio

Hepatitis C is a virus that causes liver disease and is carried in the bloodstream. It is usually transmitted through contact with blood. The virus can remain in the body for decades without causing any symptoms. But all along, it slowly and silently attacks the liver, in some cases doing permanent damage. Experts believe that about 4 million Americans may currently be infected with hepatitis C.

Here are answers to some questions you may have about this potentially dangerous disease:

How serious is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is serious for some persons, but not for others. Most persons who get hepatitis C carry the virus for the rest of their lives. Some persons with liver damage caused by hepatitis C may develop cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver and liver failure. Those conditions may take years to develop.

Does hepatitis C have any clear-cut symptoms?

Not really. Many people with long-term hepatitis C have no symptoms and feel well, but should still see their doctors. For some persons,



Hepatitis C: Are You At Risk?

Most persons who get hepatitis C carry the virus for the rest of their lives.

the most common symptom is extreme tiredness.

How do I know if I should be tested?

You should ask your healthcare provider for a test if any of these statements apply to you:

- You had a blood transfusion or an organ transplant before 1992.
- You have injected illegal drugs or used cocaine even once.
- You are on hemodialysis.
- You have had multiple sexual partners.
- You have tattoos or multiple body piercings.
- You have come into direct contact with someone else's blood.

Why should I be tested for hepatitis C?

Early diagnosis is important so you can be:

- counseled about how to prevent transmission of the disease to others
- checked for liver disease and get treatment, if necessary

Is there a vaccine to prevent hepatitis C?

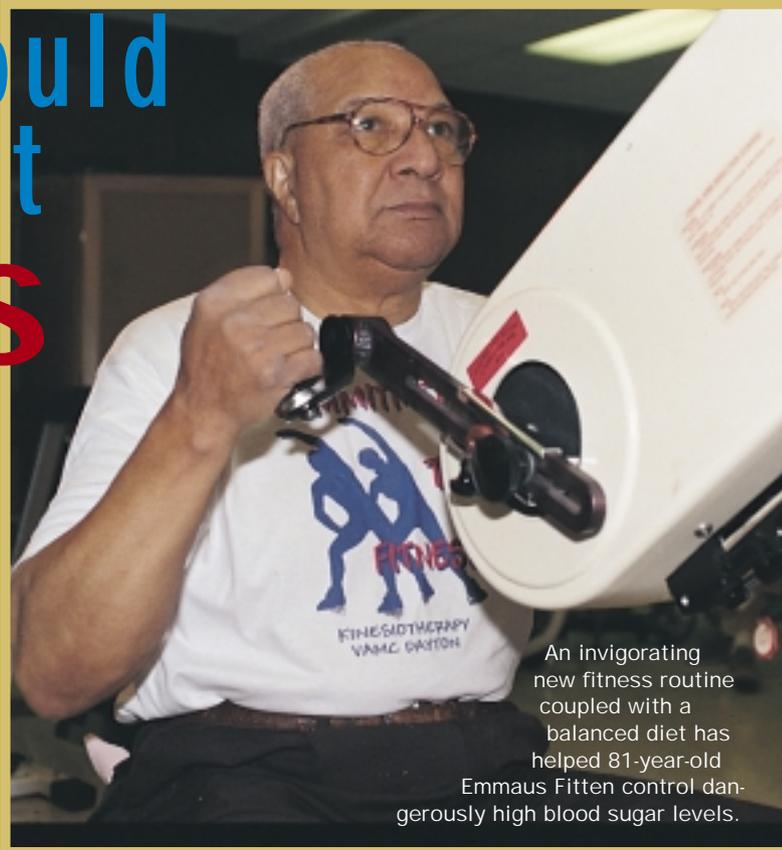
No. That's why it's especially important to prevent the disease from spreading.

If you have more questions about hepatitis C, contact your VA primary care provider. **VA**

What You Should Know About Diabetes

You feel tired. You're more thirsty than usual, so of course, you're also urinating more often. Your hands and feet have been tingling. Do you a) ignore the symptoms or b) see your healthcare provider without delay? If you answered "a," you may be one of the 8 million Americans who have diabetes but don't know it. If you answered "b," you're in luck. That's because a quick visit to your healthcare provider can help you catch diabetes early and take steps to control it.

Connie Friend, C.N.P., a diabetes educator who has been part of the Dayton VA Medical Center team since 1987, can't stress enough how important it is to control the disease. "If diabetes is not treated, the complications can be quite serious. They include diabetic retinopathy, an eye disorder that may lead to blindness, poor circula-



An invigorating new fitness routine coupled with a balanced diet has helped 81-year-old Emmaus Fitten control dangerously high blood sugar levels.

tion and nerve function, both of which can lead to amputation, and kidney failure," she says.

Understanding diabetes

"When you have diabetes, your body doesn't use sugar properly, so too much of it ends up in the bloodstream," says Friend. "Normally, your body changes the food you eat into a sugar called glucose, which is carried through the bloodstream to your body's cells. The hormone insulin then helps it enter the cell walls, where it is needed for energy. But in type II, or adult-onset diabetes," explains Friend, "your body doesn't produce enough insulin or use it properly, so glucose can't enter the cells."

Take action

The good news is that a few important lifestyle changes can help many people control blood sugar levels. In some cases, says Friend, the changes may even reduce or eliminate the need for medication. Here are the basic steps all diabetics should take:

- **Eat regular, balanced meals.** "Many people

Report these warning signs right away!

- unusual tiredness or drowsiness
- frequent urination
- extreme thirst
- unexplained weight loss even though you may be eating more
- recurrent or hard-to-heal infections
- frequent vaginal yeast infections
- blurry vision from time to time, sudden loss of vision in either eye or seeing black spots
- slow healing of sores
- tingling or numbness in hands and feet



A Refreshing Change



Emmaus Fitten's diabetes was discovered during a Prime Care visit with Connie Friend, C.N.P.

with diabetes can follow the USDA Food Guide Pyramid,” says Friend. “That means 6 to 11 servings of breads, pasta and grains; 3 to 5 servings of vegetables; 2 to 4 servings of fruit; 2 to 3 servings of dairy products; 2 to 3 servings of meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs or nuts; and very little fat.” (See page 6 for more on diabetes meal planning.)

- **Slim down if you are overweight** “Often, overweight diabetics actually make enough insulin, but their bodies aren’t using it properly,” says Friend. “Luckily, losing as little as 10 pounds can help insulin do its job.” If you’re overweight, follow a balanced eating plan that takes off no more than two pounds a week.

- **Stay active.** Exercise helps you control your weight and your blood sugar levels. The reason: Active muscles burn up a lot of glucose. Exercise

Diabetes can be a wake-up call to healthy changes. At least, that’s what happened to Emmaus Fitten. The 81-year-old former staff sergeant found out he had dangerously high blood sugar eight months ago during a Prime Care visit with Connie Friend, C.N.P.

No wonder Fitten had been feeling so tired and had lost nearly 40 pounds. “I had been feeling lifeless,” he says. “I had also been drinking a great deal of water.”

Friend thought Fitten could try to control his blood sugar without medication. So she enrolled him in the Lifetime Fitness Program, an 8-week class. “First, I had to work on a diet,” says Fitten. “I began rationing protein and cutting back on sugar and starches. I’m almost a vegetarian now.” The good news? Fitten says his new regime is a refreshing change. “Everything is tasty,” he says. “My wife, Louella, and I have been enjoying lentils, broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower.”

Fitten also works out at the VA three days a week. He uses the treadmill, stationary bicycle, rowing machine and other equipment. “You feel so invigorated afterward,” he says.

This new routine has helped bring Fitten’s blood sugar down to a more acceptable level, though he must continue to work hard at it. “The overall discipline I’ve learned has been very helpful,” says Fitten. “I’m more attentive to my own body and its care now.”

also helps the body’s cells respond to insulin better. “Do something you like that’s easily available,” says Friend. “If you haven’t been active for a while, try walking just one-quarter of a mile. Slowly build up to two miles—that’s about 30 or 40 minutes—four times a week.” (Check with your healthcare provider before starting an exercise program.)

- **Track your progress.** Some people find it helpful to monitor their blood sugar at home. After episodes of very high or very low blood sugar, Friend advises people to think about what may have caused the spike or the drop. Did they forget to take their medication? Did they skip a meal? Did they eat something they shouldn’t have? The answers can help people with diabetes avoid similar situations in the future. **VH**

TLC For Diabetic Feet

1. Wash your feet carefully each day with warm water and mild soap and dry thoroughly with a clean, soft cloth.
2. Examine your feet, looking for cuts, blisters, corns and tender spots. Check between toes and tops of feet. If a blister, a sore or any open area is not healing properly, get it checked right away.
3. Choose well-fitting (not tight) footwear.
4. Never go barefoot.
5. Wear soft, clean socks made of cotton or wool.



Connie Friend, C.N.P., examines Emmaus Fitten's feet at each visit.

For years, people with diabetes were told that cakes, candy and other sweets—simple carbohydrates—were a no-no. Experts thought they caused blood sugar levels to spike. Today, thanks to research findings, the experts know better. As a result, the American Diabetes Association issued new dietary guidelines.

The difference: flexibility

Now the experts know it's more important to keep an eye on the *total* amount of carbohydrates eaten rather than the *type*. In other words, if you have diabetes, you don't necessarily have to avoid all simple carbohydrates and stick to complex carbohydrates (potatoes, pasta, cereals and grains). With some careful planning, you can enjoy a slice of birthday cake and still control blood sugar levels.

The updated diabetic exchange lists also offer greater variety. Besides the appearance of cakes, pies and puddings, the lists now include reduced-fat, vegetarian and fast-food selections. Lists have also been regrouped to grant more flexibility and convenience.



Diabetes Meal Planning Today

Freedom of choice

How will you handle your new freedom of choice? If you're used to following a strict diet, you may feel a little confused. After all, you still have to get the proper nutrients in the right amounts. Because everyone's needs are different, it's a good idea to work closely with your VA healthcare provider. He or she can help you figure out what your daily carbohydrate intake should be.

As your eating plan takes shape, keep these guidelines in mind:

- Limit fat to 30 percent of your daily calorie intake and saturated fat to 10 percent. If you need to lose weight, you may need less fat.
- Limit cholesterol to no more than 300 milligrams a day.
- Eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, and choose high-fiber, whole-grain foods over refined breads and starches most of the time.
- Protein should make up 10 to 20 percent of your diet. Choose lean sources as much as possible.
- Use alcohol wisely. And never drink alcohol on an empty stomach because it can cause blood sugar levels to plummet.
- Space meals regularly throughout the day.

The silver lining

Controlling blood sugar levels by eating right has a wonderful payoff: better overall health. Don't be surprised if your cholesterol levels improve, your blood pressure remains in the normal range and you lose a few extra pounds. Those are simply the rewards of eating well. Enjoy them! **VH**

It's Personal

Looking for a diabetic diet? Actually, there isn't one. Think of the guidelines shown here along with the diabetic exchange lists published by the American Diabetes Association (call 1-800-342-2383 for information) as a blueprint for better health. Ask your VA healthcare provider to help you develop an eating program that answers your personal health needs.



You and Your Doctor

Make the most of this important relationship

few deep breaths and picture a

pleasant scene. And if you'd like to speak with the doctor in his or her office, where you'll be fully clothed, don't be afraid to ask.

Don't be shy. Remember that many "personal" health problems, like incontinence or impotence, can be treated.

Ask questions. Don't understand your diagnosis or the treatment strategy? Ask your



You may not have gone to medical school—or even passed biology class—so what can you possibly do to help your VA primary care provider give you the best care? Plenty! Here are some

concrete ways you can help strengthen your doctor-patient relationship:

Share your history. Find out as much as you can about your family medical history and share the information with your VA primary care provider.

Relax. You're waiting for the doctor to enter the examining room—and you're wearing nothing but a paper gown. No wonder you're nervous! To calm yourself, close your eyes, take a

doctor to explain it! Not sure when to take your medicine? Speak up! Learning the answers will help you make sense of the disease—and the cure.

Don't try to be a "good patient." If you're having trouble following your treatment plan, let your doctor know. Thankfully, medical advances mean there are usually several treatment options available. If one doesn't work, chances are good another one will. **VH**

Your Checkup Worksheet

Before your next appointment, fill out this worksheet and take it with you. Discuss your answers with your VA healthcare provider.

The symptoms I have been experiencing are:

Describe the symptoms (if it is pain, where does it occur? How far does it spread? How severe is it? How long does it last?):

I notice that they are triggered by the following (list specific foods, beverages, activities or medications that seem to set off the symptom):

I notice that they go away when (list any foods, beverages, activities or medications that seem to relieve the symptom):

I am taking the following prescription medications:

I often take the following over-the-counter medications:

Other questions I would like to discuss are:

Reaching Us Is Easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

Athens VA Campus

510 West Union Street
Athens, OH 45701
740-593-7314

Brecksville VA Campus

10000 Brecksville Road
Brecksville, OH 44141
216-526-3030

Canton VA Campus

221 3rd Street SE
Canton, OH 44702
330-489-4600

Chillicothe VA Campus

17273 State Route 104
Chillicothe, OH 45601
614-773-1141

Cincinnati VA Campus

3200 Vine Street
Cincinnati, OH 45220
513-861-3100

Columbus VA Campus

543 Taylor Avenue
Columbus, OH 43203
614-257-5200

Dayton VA Campus

4100 West Third Street
Dayton, OH 45428
937-268-6511

Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075
513-861-3100

Lorain VA Campus

205 West 20th Street
Lorain, OH 44052
440-244-3833

Mansfield VA Campus

1456 Park Avenue West
Suite N
Mansfield, OH 44906
419-529-4602

McCafferty VA Campus

4242 Lorain Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44113
216-939-0699

Middletown VA Campus

675 North University Blvd.
Middletown, OH 45042
513-423-8387

Call Tele-Nurse



There's someone on the line 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to serve you. If you have symptoms, questions or need advice about any health problem, call us toll free at **1-888-VET-OHIO (1-888-838-6446)**.

Otis Moss/University Hospital VA Campus

8819 Quincy Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44106
740-353-2850

Painesville VA Campus

54 South State Street
Suite 204
Painesville, OH 44077
440-357-6740

Sandusky VA Campus

3416 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, OH 44870
419-625-7350

Springfield VA Campus

2055 South Limestone

Springfield, OH 45505
937-328-3385

Wade Park VA Campus

10701 East Boulevard
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-791-3800

Youngstown VA Campus

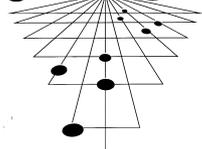
2031 Belmont Avenue
Youngstown, OH 44505
330-740-9200

Zanesville VA Campus

840 Bethesda Drive
Building 3A
Zanesville, OH 43701
740-453-7725

VA Healthcare System of Ohio
8600 Governor's Hill Drive, Suite 115
Cincinnati, OH 45249

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