

to your

# Health!

*"Promoting Good Health Through Information"*

Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System • Patient Education Newsletter • Summer 2005

## West Nile Virus

By Rosemary Gill, RN, MS

### West Nile virus in California

The West Nile virus was originally found in Africa in 1937 near the West Nile in Uganda. The first case in the United States occurred in New York in 1999. In the past year or so, the West Nile virus has come to California. Last year 2470 cases of West Nile virus and 88 associated deaths were reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). A total of 771 of those cases and 23 of those deaths happened in California.



### How is the virus spread?

The virus is usually spread to humans through a mosquito bite. Mosquitoes pick up the virus from infected birds or animals.

### What are the symptoms of West Nile virus?

Symptoms usually occur 3 to 14 days after the mosquito bite. Often there are no symptoms or only a mild fever or aching. However, some people may become seriously ill when infected with the West Nile virus. Symptoms of severe illness can include a high fever, headache, stiff neck, confusion, weakness, and coma. Those most at risk for severe illness due to West Nile virus are people over the age of 50. This is especially true for individuals with weakened immune systems, although even healthy people can become very sick.

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Visit our new patient education website at <http://www.palo-alto.med.va.gov/patienteducation/patienteducation.htm>

## Recipe for Health

### SUMMER VEGETABLE SPAGHETTI

*This lively vegetarian pasta dish is delicious hot or cold.*

#### Ingredients:

2 C small yellow onions, cut in eighths	2 Tbsp fresh parsley, minced
2 C (about 1 lb) ripe tomatoes, peeled, chopped	1 clove garlic, minced
2 C (about 1 lb) yellow and green squash, thinly sliced	1/2 tsp chili powder
1 1/2 C (about 1/2 lb) fresh green beans, cut	1/4 tsp salt
2/3 C water	to taste black pepper
	1 can (6 oz) tomato paste
	1 lb spaghetti, uncooked
	1/2 C Parmesan cheese, grated

1. Combine first 10 ingredients in large saucepan. Cook for 10 minutes, then stir in tomato paste. Cover and cook gently for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are tender.
2. Cook spaghetti in unsalted water according to package directions.
3. Spoon sauce over drained hot spaghetti. Sprinkle Parmesan cheese on top.

Yield: 9 servings  
Serving size: 1 cup of spaghetti and 3/4 cup of sauce with vegetables

#### Each serving provides:

Calories: 271	Total fat: 3 g
Saturated fat: 1 g	Cholesterol: 4 mg
Sodium: 328 mg	Total fiber: 5 g
Protein: 11 g	Carbohydrates: 51 g
Potassium: 436 mg	

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>

# What is Dementia?

By Laura Peters, Ph.D., Staff Psychologist, Western Blind Rehabilitation Center

As we age, one of the greatest fears we face is the loss of our ability to concentrate, reason, problem-solve, and remember. When these abilities decline to the point where we can no longer effectively carry out normal daily activities, we may be diagnosed with a dementia. In addition, a person with dementia may show changes in mood, personality, and actions.

The term dementia is used to describe a group of characteristics. It is not a single disease. Some types of dementia may be reversible, such as dementia due to medication side effects, alcohol abuse, “abnormal” body chemistry, or emotional issues such as depression. Therefore, in a person who is diagnosed with dementia, a “dementia workup” is important to rule out reversible causes of their mental decline. This workup might involve blood tests, CT scans, and neuropsychological evaluations. Other types of dementia are not reversible. These types of dementia can be caused by multiple strokes, a severe head injury, or Alzheimer’s disease. Alzheimer’s disease is the most common form of dementia. There is no way to definitely diagnose it until after death when an autopsy can be performed. Usually all other causes of cognitive decline will be ruled out before a “probable Alzheimer’s disease” diagnosis is made.

## West Nile Virus

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### How is West Nile virus treated?

Currently, there is no specific treatment for West Nile virus. Mild symptoms usually go away on their own. People with severe symptoms are given supportive care in the hospital. Researchers are currently working to develop treatment for those who get sick, as well as a vaccine to prevent the disease.

### What to do if you become sick?

If you are having severe symptoms, you should seek medical care right away. People with severe illness often need to be hospitalized.

### How to protect yourself?

- The best way to protect yourself from West Nile virus is to avoid getting mosquito bites. If you are outside, use a repellent containing DEET (N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide).
- Wear long sleeves and long pants.
- Do not leave standing water outside since mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water. Change water in bird baths and pet dishes at least once a week.
- Make sure window and door screens are well sealed.

### More about DEET

The most effective mosquito repellents contain DEET (N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide). These repellents can be used on skin or clothing. Higher concentrations (a higher percentage of DEET) last longer. Repellents range from 4.75% DEET, which protect against mosquito bites for about 90 minutes, to those with 23.8% DEET which protect for about 5 hours. DEET should not be applied to open cuts or under clothes. It is also very important to wash the DEET off with soap and water once you return indoors. Follow the directions on the label carefully. If you feel you are having a reaction to DEET, you can call the national poison control number: 1-800-222-1222.

There is much more information at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). Check it out!

### What Can You Do to Stay Mentally Sharp?

- **Remain Mentally Active**
  - Learn something new each day
  - Read
  - Volunteer
  - Do crafts or make things
  - Create and follow a recipe
  - Listen to books on tape and discuss them with others
  - Take a class
  - Teach a class
- **Remain Physically Active**
  - 30 minutes of exercise a day
  - Walking
  - Aerobics
  - Yoga
  - Gardening
  - Dancing
  - Home Maintenance
- **Remain Socially Engaged**
  - Join organizations or clubs that meet regularly
  - Volunteer
  - Spend time with children or grandchildren
  - Participate in community activities
  - Send e-mails to family and friends
- **Eat Foods That Aid Your Brain**
  - Low fat and low cholesterol diets
  - Healthy Foods
    - *Fruits and Vegetables: spinach, broccoli, red bell pepper, blueberries, strawberries, plums*
    - *Fish: salmon, tuna, halibut*
    - *Nuts: walnuts, almonds*
- **Maintain Healthy Habits: Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol in excess**

# How Much Do You Need?

By Wanda Tacey MSN, RN, PHN

Adequate hydration has been found to improve energy and endurance. But how much do you really need? You have probably heard the advice: You need 6-8 glasses of water a day. Is that the same if you are 5'2" and 110 pounds, versus 6'1" and 250 pounds? And how big should the glass be? ... 6 oz? ... 8 oz? ... 10 oz? A more recent suggestion is to take your weight in pounds and divide by two in order to determine the recommended number of ounces per day that you should drink. Example: 160 pounds / 2 = 80 (80 oz. or 10 8-oz glasses of water)

## What should you drink? Water? Diet Soda? Coffee? Tea? Sports Drinks?

Specialists say that caffeine, carbonation, and sugar substitutes can irritate the bladder and keep you running to the bathroom. Sports drinks are supposedly quicker than plain water at restoring energy and replacing electrolytes, and may be helpful if you are exercising for more than 1 hour. Also, if you like the taste of sports drinks you are likely to drink more and avoid dehydration. However, sports drinks have

a lot of calories (125 calories in 12 oz.), so you may be better off with calorie-free liquids. If you do not like the taste of water, try chilling it and adding a slice of lemon.

Mineral water can be a good way to get extra bone-building calcium. However, some brands contain more calcium than others and only bottles labeled "mineral water" are guaranteed to contain natural minerals.

Do you become overly tired while you are exercising? Check your water intake. When the hydration levels of a group of exercisers were tested on arrival at the gym by the Gatorade Sport Science Institute, almost half showed signs of dehydration. "Being even a little dehydrated can make you feel lethargic when you're trying to exercise," says hydration expert Michael Sawka, PhD, of the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine. However, chugging large amounts of fluid immediately before exercise, such as a quart of water, cola, or sports drink, increases the chance of getting a stitch—that annoying pain in your side. Instead,

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## Diabetes Quiz

### TRUE OR FALSE?

1. There are two major types of diabetes.
2. Being inactive is a risk factor for developing Type 2 diabetes.
3. Having diabetes doesn't increase your risk for having a heart attack or stroke.
4. If you have diabetes you have to eat special foods
5. People with diabetes have to inject themselves with insulin.
6. Testing blood sugar is the best way for people with diabetes to know how well they are taking care of their diabetes.

### ANSWERS

#### 1. TRUE.

Type 1 Diabetes - A disease where the body produces little or no insulin.

Type 2 Diabetes - A metabolic disorder resulting from the body's inability to make enough, or properly use, insulin.

#### 2. TRUE.

Participating in physical activity less than three times a week can increase a person's risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

#### 3. FALSE.

If you have diabetes, you are at high risk for heart attack

and stroke. Heart disease is more likely to strike you - and at an earlier age - than someone without diabetes.

#### 4. FALSE.

People with diabetes do not need to eat special foods. However, they should try to eat foods that are low in fat, salt and sugar and high in fiber such as beans, fruits, vegetables and grains. People with diabetes are encouraged to meet with a dietitian to help plan their meals.

#### 5. FALSE.

Not everyone with diabetes is on insulin. You only need

insulin if your body has stopped making insulin or if it does not make enough.

#### 6. TRUE.

The best way for a person with diabetes to find out how well they are taking care of their diabetes is for them to check their blood to see how much glucose is in it. If the blood has too much or too little glucose, a change in meal plan, exercise plan, or medicine may be needed.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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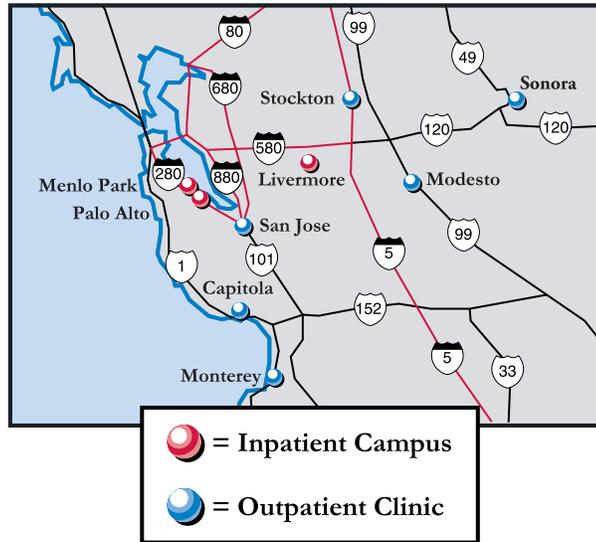
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[www.palo-alto.med.va.gov](http://www.palo-alto.med.va.gov)



## How Much Water Do You Need?

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you should drink 8 ounces of water during the hour before you exercise. Also, be aware of recent reports of athletes over hydrating (taking in too much fluid). This is a rare but potentially serious problem. Experts advise drinking no more than 8 oz of fluid every 20 minutes during exercise.

### Questions or Comments?

If you have any questions or topics you would like addressed in *To Your Health* feel free to contact:

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Out for a walk, spending the day at a theme park, or working in the yard on a sunny summer day? Try these suggestions. You can add instant air conditioning by wetting your shirt. You can freeze a half-full water bottle, then fill it with water the rest of the way when you head outside, for a drink that stays cool longer. When the temperature rises, you need to increase your fluid intake to compensate for the fluid lost by sweating. For every hour that you are outside, you should drink 8 ounces of fluid. Do not count alcoholic beverages since alcohol is dehydrating.

Going on vacation? If you are driving, remember to have a bottle of water in the car for each person. If you are flying, skip the cocktail, soda or coffee, and drink water to stay hydrated in the low humidity of the airplane cabin.

Reference: [www.prevention.com](http://www.prevention.com)



## Tips for Healthy Living

- Increase the fiber in your diet with fresh fruit and vegetables or whole grains.
- Exercise with a video if the weather is bad.