

to your

Health!

"Promoting Good Health Through Information"

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

How Do We Measure Up?

Noelle Hasson, PharmD

VA Palo Alto Health Care System is committed to providing the highest quality health care services available. To make sure we are continually improving the quality of our care, we monitor how we are doing through "performance measures."

What is a performance measure?

Basically, a performance measure is a goal that we set for ourselves. We set goals to improve patient care and use our resources wisely. We work very hard to achieve these goals, and monitor them regularly to make sure we are on track. Ultimately, this is a way to measure and continually improve the quality of the care we provide to veterans.

What are some examples?

Lipid Performance Measure: Reduce the number of patients at high risk for heart disease who are not being treated with cholesterol medication.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States. Many veterans are at

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

Recipe for Health HOMEMADE TURKEY SOUP

To make this popular soup lower in saturated fat, prepare it ahead of time to cool and skim off the fat that rises to the top.

Ingredients:

6 lb turkey breast. It should have some meat (at least 2 cups)	1/2 tsp dried rosemary
remaining on it to make a good, rich soup.	1/2 tsp dried sage
2 medium onions	1 tsp dried basil
3 stalks of celery	1/2 tsp dried marjoram
1 tsp dried thyme	1/2 tsp dried tarragon
	1/2 tsp salt
	to taste black pepper
	1/2 lb Italian pasta

1. Place turkey breast in a large 6-quart pot. Cover with water, at least 3/4 full.
2. Peel onions, cut in large pieces, and add to pot. Wash celery stalks, slice, and add to pot also.
3. Simmer covered for about 2-1/2 hours.
4. Remove carcass from pot. Divide soup into smaller, shallower containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator.
5. After cooling, skim off fat.
6. While soup is cooling, remove remaining meat from turkey carcass. Cut into pieces.
7. Add turkey meat to skimmed soup along with herbs and spices.
8. Bring to a boil and add pastina. Continue cooking on low boil for about 20 minutes until pastina is done. Serve at once or refrigerate for later reheating.

Makes about 4 quarts (16 servings)

Serving size: 1 cup

Calories	226	Cholesterol	93 mg
Fat	5 g	Sodium	217 mg
Saturated fat	1 g		

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

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high risk for developing heart disease. We know that cholesterol medications can help reduce the risk of a heart attack and stroke in patients who have heart disease. Therefore, we have set a goal to make sure that patients who can benefit from treatment are receiving treatment.

Hypertension Performance Measure: Increase the percent of patients with high blood pressure who are receiving a thiazide diuretic.

Hypertension (high blood pressure) increases the risk for heart disease and stroke. High blood pressure can also lead to other problems, such as heart failure, kidney disease, and blindness. There are many drugs that are effective for treating high blood pressure. Often, two or more drugs work better than one. Thiazide diuretics, sometimes called “water pills”, are generally well tolerated, inexpensive, and have been proven to reduce both illness and death in patients with high blood pressure. For these reasons, experts consider thiazide diuretics drugs of first choice for treating high blood pressure.

How do performance measures help me?

Performance measures are designed to identify patients that can benefit from certain therapies. If you are at risk for heart disease, your provider may want you to start taking a cholesterol-lowering medication, such as simvastatin or niacin. If you are being treated for high blood pressure, your provider may want you to start taking a thiazide diuretic, such as hydrochlorothiazide (HCTZ).

How can I help VAPAHCS meet its performance measures?

- Talk with your provider about your risk for heart disease. Ask if you would benefit from taking a cholesterol-lowering medication.
- If you have high blood pressure, ask your provider if a thiazide diuretic would be right for you.
- If you are prescribed a new medication, take it!

Calculate your 10-year risk of having a heart attack!

Go to <http://hin.nhlbi.nih.gov/atpiii/calculator.asp?usertype=pub> to calculate your 10-year risk for having a heart attack. If your 10-year risk is 20% or greater, or you have existing heart disease, peripheral vessel disease, or diabetes, you will most likely benefit from starting a cholesterol medication. If your 10-year risk is 10%-20%, you may benefit from starting a cholesterol medication.

Talk with your provider about these results!

Test Your Heart Disease IQ

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/chd/TFQuiz/tfquiz.htm>

Please answer true or false to the following questions:

1. I already have heart disease. It is too late to reduce my risk for further complications.
2. My last cholesterol level was within my goal. This means I do not have to worry about my cholesterol anymore.
3. Eating less saturated fat is the best dietary change I can make to lower my blood cholesterol.
4. I should avoid all fat.
5. Losing weight if I am overweight will help me to lower my blood cholesterol.
6. Exercise can improve blood cholesterol level.

Answers on page 5

What Should You Do with Your Expired Medications?

Kari Kobayashi, PharmD

Take a look in your medicine cabinet. Do you have any expired or unused medications in your medicine cabinet at home? If you answered “yes,” there are many reasons why you should dispose of them.

Most importantly, keeping unused or expired medications at home could be very dangerous to your health. It is easy to confuse old medications with current medications, and you might end up taking the old medications by mistake. This could lead to drug interactions, toxic drug levels in your body, or harmful side effects. In effect, you may become ill if you accidentally take old medications.

Another reason why you need to dispose of expired or unused medications is to protect the safety of pets and children. Pets and children will often swallow medications that they discover because they are curious and do not know any better. If this happens, they may suffer harmful side effects and may even die. Therefore, not only should you store medications where children and pets cannot reach them, but you should get rid of any medications that you no longer use.

What is the proper way to dispose of expired, unused, and unwanted medications?

Although you may have been told to flush medications down the toilet or to pour them down the sink, this is NOT the correct answer! Flushing medications down the toilet or pouring them down the sink can plug your drainage system. But more importantly, disposing of medications in this manner may be harmful to our environment. If we do not properly dispose of medications, they may end up in our drinking water, in the soil that our food grows, and in our oceans.

There are a few options for getting rid of your expired or unused medications. You may contact your local enforcement agency and ask if they will allow you to bring in old medications (see inset for local phone numbers). Unfortunately, in many cities there are no formal programs for medication disposal. If your local enforcement agency will not accept your old medications, you may throw them in the trash. However, there are some steps you should take to make sure that you are doing so safely:

- 1) Keep medications in their original container with the childproof lids attached. Remember to tear off or black out patient names.
- 2) For pills, try to make it so that even if children or pets find them, they will not be able to swallow them. For example, pour glue into the container to make the pills stick together, or add some water & kitty litter so that the medication is unpalatable.
- 3) Patches should be folded in half and placed into a sealed container.
- 4) Package glass bottles carefully to prevent them from breaking. Consider sealing them in a plastic bag so if there is leakage it will be contained.
- 5) Tape up medication containers very well, making them difficult to open.
- 6) Double bag medications or place them in a box and secure it with tape.
- 7) Throw the medications in a trash bin that children and pets are least likely to find, as close to garbage pick up time as possible.

Where can I dispose home-generated needles (Sharps) in California?

First, contact your local enforcement agency and ask if they collect needles (sharps) at their collection facilities or on household hazardous waste days (see inset for local phone numbers). Alternatively, needles can be placed into a strong plastic or metal container with a tight cap or lid, such as a plastic bleach bottle or coffee can. Don't use glass containers or lightweight plastic containers because they can break or be punctured. Seal the container with strong tape and place the container in the garbage. If you use a recyclable container, make sure it doesn't end up in the recycling bin by mistake!

Local Enforcement Agency Phone Numbers:

Santa Clara (408)-299-7300	Contra Costa (925)-646-5225	Stanislaus (209) 525-4123
San Mateo (650)-363-4718	San Joaquin (209)-468-3066	Calaveras (209) 532-1413
Alameda (800)-606-6606	Santa Cruz (831)-420-5220	Tuolumne (800) 870-9378

Low Carb Diets: Are They the Answer?

Eileen Stein, MS, RD, CDE

Much has been said over the past several months about low carbohydrate (or low carb) diets - Atkins and South Beach Diets leading the way. The question is: are low carb diets the diet we should all be following? Unfortunately, there is no easy answer. The best answer is: it depends.

If following a low carb diet means you are not eating doughnuts, pastries, cookies, ice cream and you are not drinking regular soda, then that is definitely an improvement! However, if following a low carb diet means you are eating very few, if any, whole grains, fruits or vegetables, probably not.

Because low carb diets limit or eliminate the grains, fruits and many vegetables, they depend very heavily on meats and protein foods, and fats. If you are choosing lean meats, low fat cheese and heart-healthy fats (like olive oil, for example), a low carb diet may not be all bad. However, if you are diving in to high-fat steaks with cheese sauce, full fat salad dressings and bacon cheeseburgers (without the bun, of course!), this could be a problem.

What are Carbohydrates?

Foods are composed of three basic “macronutrients”: carbohydrates, proteins and fats. Each provides calories to the diet, as well as other things to nourish your body. Carbohydrates are the primary source of energy for your body and the only source of energy for your brain. Protein helps to build lean tissue and muscle throughout your body, while fats provide some energy as well as help your body absorb certain vitamins.

Carbohydrates are generally divided into two categories: simple and complex. Simple carbohydrates are usually sugar, either sucrose (table sugar) or the sugar found in fruits. Complex carbohydrates are the starchy foods - bread, rice, pasta, potatoes, and beans.

Carbohydrates and Insulin

Most carbohydrates are broken down to glucose (sugar) and absorbed into the blood. The body produces a hormone called insulin, which helps move glucose from the blood into cells and muscles, where it is used for energy.

If you eat more carbohydrates than your body needs, the excess will be stored as fat. Keep in mind, however, if you eat more protein than your body needs, that excess will also be stored as fat.

Are Low Carbohydrate Diets Effective?

Many people who follow low carb diets do lose weight. In fact, a few studies have shown that at 6 months, people who followed low carb diets lost more weight and were less likely to stop the diet than those who followed a more conventional low fat diet. By one year, however, both groups had lost the same amount of weight and had approximately the same rate of drop-outs (about 30% for both groups).

Some studies show that with the low carb diets, there is, surprisingly, an improvement in blood fats (cholesterol and triglycerides, another type of fat in the blood). Other studies show no change in blood fats. The reason for this may be that many studies look only at the amount of carbohydrates in the diet, and not at whether the fat consumed in the diets are saturated (bad for the heart, like butter, cheese, and fatty meats) or more heart-healthy.

One area of concern with high protein diets is the fact that excess protein places more strain on the kidneys. This is especially of concern for those who already have kidney problems and for older individuals, who are more likely to develop kidney problems.

What About All the “Low Carb” Foods Available?

Just as they did during the low fat craze in the 1980’s and 1990’s, manufacturers have jumped on the low carbohydrate bandwagon. There are now low carb ice creams, cereals, chocolate bars, milk and yogurt available, just to name a few. Many fast food and chain restaurants now offer “low carb” options. The problem with these foods is that, while they may be lower in carbohydrates, they can still be very high in calories. As we should have learned during the low fat craze, you cannot eat unlimited amounts of any food with calories and still expect to lose weight.

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Healthy Aging Lecture Series

We are pleased to announce another year of our monthly “Healthy Aging Lecture Series,” held September through June. These lectures are sponsored by the Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center (GRECC) and the Women’s Health Program. This series is open to everyone, including patients and their family members, staff and volunteers! Please feel welcome to attend, and bring a “brown bag” lunch. All sessions are held on Wednesdays from 12:00 noon to 1:00 p.m. at VAPAHCS Palo Alto Division, 3801 Miranda Avenue, Library Conference Room, Bldg. 101, 2nd Floor, A2-120. These lectures are also video-conferenced to all VAPAHCS Divisions.

For further information on v-tel locations, the video archive, other upcoming GRECC lectures, or for a map with directions, please visit our GRECC Website at <http://www.palo-alto.med.va.gov/show.asp?durki=851>. For further information on this lecture series, please call (650) 493-5000, Betty Wexler, RN, MS, CNS (x64143), Susan Bass, MSW (x65246), or Ann Thrailkill, RNP, MSN, CS (ext. 64253).

Upcoming Lectures

January 19, 2005

Recreation Activities for Patients with Dementia

February 16, 2005

Memory Problems: When to Worry

March 16, 2005

Swallowing Problems

April 20, 2005

Healthy Eating = Healthy Weight

May 18, 2005

Overview of Medicare Changes & New Drug Cards

June 15, 2005

Latest Updates on Prostate Cancer

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Low Carb Diets

The Bottom Line

A recent article in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that the effectiveness of weight loss diets was more closely related to diet duration and calories than diet composition. In effect, this means that overall calorie intake is the most important factor.

If you choose to follow a lower carbohydrate diet, do not eliminate carbohydrates entirely. Strive for healthier, whole grain carbohydrates, dried beans, vegetables and fruits. Eliminate the refined sugars, sweets, cookies, pastries, crackers, ice cream, sodas and so forth. When choosing meats and protein, opt for lean meat (loin, round or flank are the leanest cuts), skinless chicken or turkey, lower fat cheese, and plenty of heart-healthy fish. Try to limit regular cheese and fatty meats (ribs, rib eye steaks, lunch meats, hot dogs, sausage and bacon). Select low fat (1% or fat free) milk and low fat or nonfat yogurt in place of the higher fat versions. And remember, calories count, so moderation is still the key!

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Heart Disease IQ Test Answers

1. False. If you lower your blood cholesterol level, you can reduce your risk of a future heart attack and other complications and could actually prolong your life.
2. False. High cholesterol and heart disease are not cured but are only controlled by diet and drug therapy.
3. True. Saturated fat raises your blood cholesterol more than anything else you eat.
4. False. Your body needs fat for a variety of functions. Not all dietary fat is bad. Just be sure to limit the total amount of fats or oils, since even those that are unsaturated are a rich source of calories.
5. True. If you are overweight, losing even a little weight can help to lower LDL-cholesterol.
6. True. Regular physical activity may reduce complications from heart disease by: lowering LDL levels, raising HDL levels, lowering blood pressure, lowering triglyceride levels, reducing excess weight, and improving the fitness of your heart and lungs.

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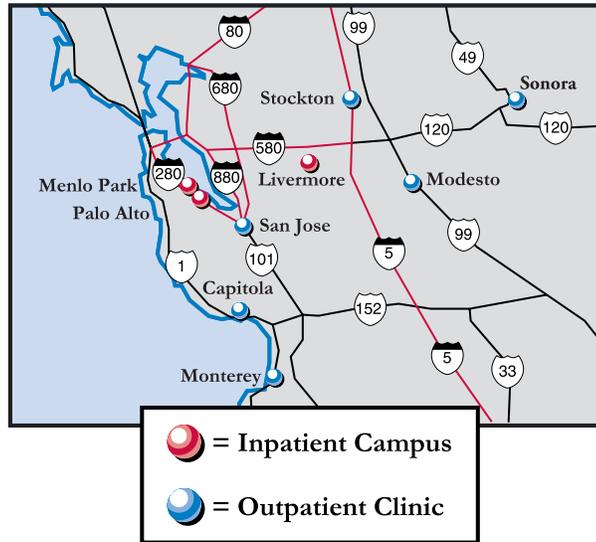
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Questions or Comments?

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

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To Your Health is published quarterly for VAPAHCS veterans and their families.

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VA Palo Alto Health Care System – Palo Alto Division



Tips for Healthy Living

- Share an entree with a friend
- Join an exercise group