

to your

# Health!

VA Veterans Affairs PAHCS Palo Alto Health Care System VA HEALTH CARE Defining EXCELLENCE in the 21st Century

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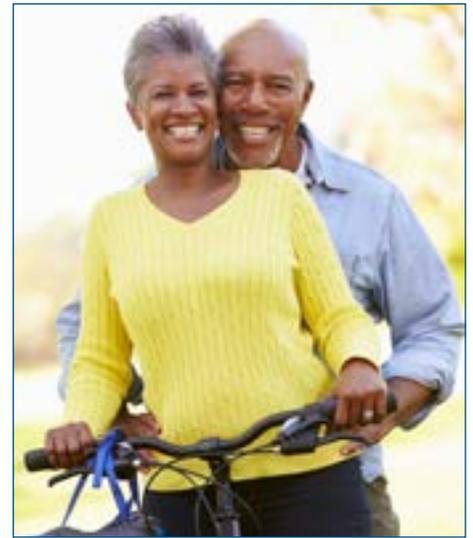
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## Exercise and Blood Sugar

*Paul Barron, Therapy Assistant and Alisa Krinsky, MS, CTRS, Recreation Therapy Supervisor; VA Palo Alto Health Care System*

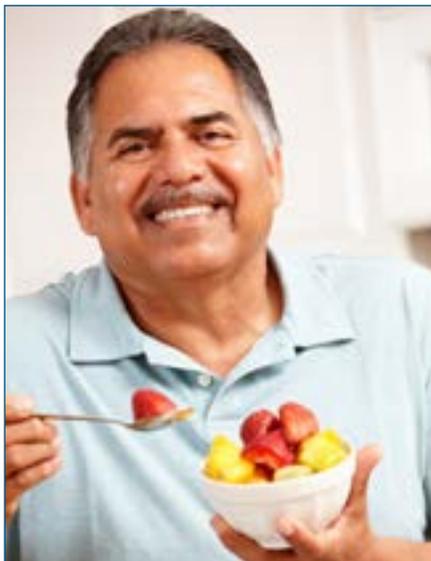
A healthy diet and regular physical activity can play a big role in preventing type 2 diabetes by ensuring that the food you eat is being used as fuel and your metabolism is being used effectively. Your pancreas makes a hormone called insulin which is required for your body to absorb the sugar in your blood after a meal. It can be turned into energy for your muscles or stored as fat. When you overeat and have a sedentary lifestyle, there can be more sugar in your blood than your body is able to absorb. Your body then



See **Exercise and Blood Sugar** – page 4

## Jump Starting Your Spring Diet

*Roshan Luke, RD; Nutrition and Food Service; VA Palo Alto Health Care System*



The gloom of winter is behind us and the spring showers and flowers are almost here. How is your diet, exercise and life style doing now that you are wearing fewer layers? If you believe that your diet and lifestyle can use a jump start, keep reading.

Good news, the first step towards jump starting your diet and lifestyle is completed. The first step was to decide that you wanted a change and look for ways to make that happen. By continuing to read on you made a choice.

The second step is to jump into the change with both feet. This means that you have decided to make a change in one or more areas of your lifestyle. Get out of your own way and allow yourself to just start your change.

The third step is to start. You can start with your diet, by adding more exercise, changing your current exercise or lastly by changing your lifestyle. Dietary changes can include adding more vegetables, changing your beverages or looking for healthy meal options.

See **Jump Start** – page 2

### **How can you add more vegetables?**

Try a new vegetable every week. This way you increase the chances of eating a wide variety of healthy vegetables.

Add your favorite vegetable to your lunch and dinner meals. You can also add the vegetables into your favorite dishes such as meatloaf, casseroles or salads.

Improve the taste and flavor of the vegetables. Add a little salad dressing or your favorite seasoning (such as garlic, onions or hot sauce to name a few).

You can blend or juice your vegetables or even make them into a hearty soup.

### **You are what you drink!**

As a whole we drink too many sugary drinks. These include sodas, juice, sweetened coffee or teas. These drinks can add lots of extra calories to our diets.

Consider switching to water or cut back on the cream and sugar in your drinks.

### **For healthy meals options:**

Try to cook without adding extra fats or calories to you diet. You can do this by baking, boiling, broiling, microwaving or grilling many of your foods.

If you decide to use frozen meals always add extra vegetables, keep the salt low and look for ones with less fat.

Limit eating out or eating fast food.

### **How can you add more exercise to your lifestyle?**

Start by picking an activity that you enjoy.

You can walk, hike, golf, walk the dog, wash your car, mow the lawn with a push mower, play with your children, play tennis, work in your garden or join a local sports team. You can also join a local gym. Check with your local VA clinics, they may have exercise programs that you can join.

Start at your own pace. You do not have to start with 30-60 minutes of exercise. If you have not been exercising at all, start slowly and build up. Can only walk 5 minutes? That's OK. Try that for a week then see if you can increase it to 10 minutes. Gradually increase your time or distance or pace.

### **Other lifestyle changes to consider:**

Keep track of how much time you spend in front the television or computer outside of work. Try to decrease your screen time to no more than 2 hours a day.

Keep things out of your home that will make you stop your change.

Set realistic goals. If you want to lose 50 pounds, but limit yourself to three months, you could be setting yourself up for failure. It took a while for you to gain the weight, give yourself time to lose the weight.

Do things that keep you moving.

Try to get enough sleep. If you are tired it can slow you down.

The fourth or last step is to congratulate yourself when you do well and make changes when you fall down or do not make your goal. It is okay to repeat the steps as needed. The road to making changes is not a straight line, it is okay to make turns or even circles. The important thing is to keep moving forward!

### **Questions or Comments?**

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

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

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# Save Your Hearing!

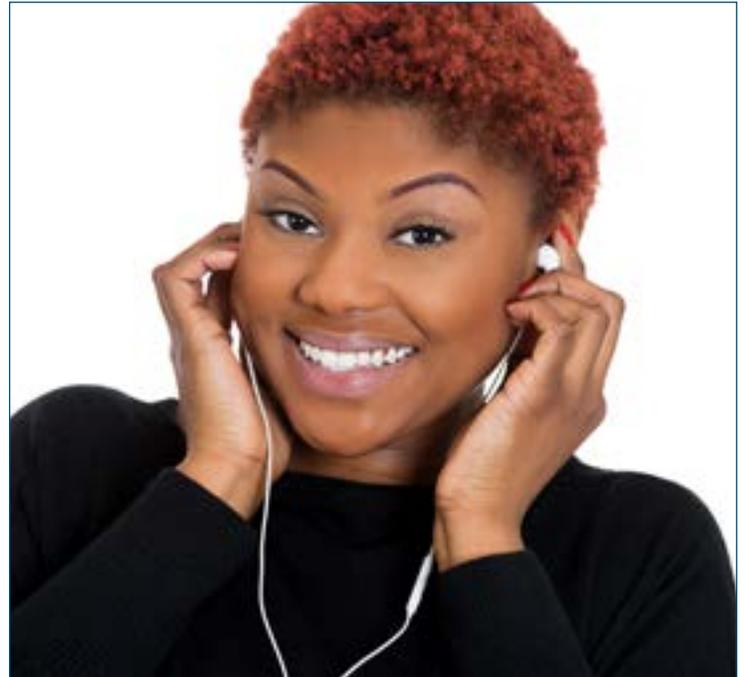
*Kristen Karakus, MA CCC-SLP; Audiology and Speech Pathology; VA Palo Alto Health Care System*

Noise induced hearing loss is something we are all at risk of but is also completely preventable. When exposed to loud noise for long enough, we risk permanent damage to our hearing. Imagine a world where you are unable to hear your loved ones talk to you, hear your favorite song on the radio or enjoy the sounds of the world around you.

Common recreational activities can result in noise exposure that can lead to permanent damage to your hearing. Experts agree that exposure to noise that is at or above 85 decibels (the unit of measurement for sounds) can result in irreversible hearing loss over time.

According to the Sight and Hearing Association, here are some decibel levels that you may find yourself exposed to on a daily basis:

- Lawn mower, city traffic – 88 Decibels (damage possible in 4 hours)
- Hair dryer, garbage disposal – 91 Decibels (damage possible in 2 hours)
- Electric Drill – 94 Decibels (damage possible in 1 hour)
- Motorcycle – 97 Decibels (damage possible in 30 minutes)
- MP3 Players, Snowmobiles – 100 Decibels (damage possible in 15 minutes)
- Leaf Blower, Stadium Sports Game – 115 Decibels (damage possible in 30 seconds)
- Rock concert, Ambulance Siren – 120 Decibels (damage possible in less than 8 seconds)
- Fire alarm, fire cracker – 125 Decibels
- Jet engine at take-off, gunshot – 140 Decibels (immediate damage possible)



The key to protecting your hearing is to limit your exposure. Here are some tips for limiting your noise exposure and protecting your hearing.

**Wear ear protection.** If you are going to be using power tools, working with yard equipment, attending concerts or even the movies, consider wearing ear plugs.

**Turn down the volume.** When listening to music, whether on your MP3 player, on the radio while driving, while playing video games or watching TV at home, turn the volume down. A good rule of thumb is that if you have to raise your voice for others to hear you speak, the volume is too loud.

**Consider noise cancelling headphones.** Noise cancelling headphones used while listening to a personal music device, such as an iPod, can cancel out background noise and make it less tempting to turn up the volume to block out the noise.

**Create your space.** When attending live music events, try to position yourself away from the speakers. At fireworks shows, try not to sit close to where the fireworks are being launched from. And remember your ear plugs!

**Consider noise output when making purchases.** When buying toys for children, new yard equipment or tools, consider how much noise the product makes and how loud that noise is. Where possible, make the choice to purchase a product with lower noise output.

By taking some simple steps, you can protect your hearing for years to come!



## Exercise and Blood Sugar – continued from page 1

can become inefficient at using its insulin. If this goes on for too long, your body could start to resist insulin, which means your blood sugar levels can get high and stay high. This can lead to type 2 diabetes. Physical activity not only helps to control blood sugar levels, but it also helps you to lose weight, control blood pressure, and control cholesterol levels.

If you already have diabetes, it is important to ensure that your blood sugar level is above 100 prior to exercising because when you exercise, your blood sugar level will definitely drop (this decrease may occur several hours after exercise). The more rigorous the exercise, the more your blood sugar level will decrease. Test your blood sugar level prior to beginning any exercise or physical activity. If not in the desired range (above 100), then eat a piece of fruit or drink some juice to assure your blood sugar levels are within the desired range. The opposite can also be dangerous. If your blood sugar level is generally above 300, it is important to talk with your provider before starting an exercise plan. Taking these precautions prior to exercising



will prevent you from having a diabetic reaction which can lead to a more serious situation. After you engage in any physical activity, it is recommended to check your blood sugar level and take necessary steps to increase your blood sugar level to the desired target. It is important for you to know your blood sugar targets. If you do not, please consult with your primary care or diabetes provider.



## Color Your Plate: Signaling You to Better Nutrition at the Canteen

*Serena Gray, RN; Health Promotion/Disease Prevention Coordinator; VA Palo Alto Health Care System*

Have you ever looked at the nutrition label on the back of your food and been more confused than ever about whether that item is good for you or not? Food labels can be very hard to read and understand. What if there was a simple system to know which foods were more healthy or less healthy. There now is! At the VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS) Canteen locations in Palo Alto and Menlo Park, Green, Yellow and Red signs are being placed to help you better understand your choices.

This program is called “Color Your Plate” which is a collaboration between Nutrition, Canteen Services, Employee

Wellness and the Health Promotion Disease Prevention Program. Just like a street traffic light, these colors will signal to you when you are making a more healthy choice or a less healthy choice.

Foods labeled with Green are those that are low in calories, fat and sodium (salt). These are items that you can eat often as part of a healthy diet.

Foods labeled with Yellow are those that you should eat with caution, perhaps once or twice a week with a healthy diet.

Foods labeled with Red are those that are high in calories, fat and sodium. We recommend you eat these only once or twice a month, if at all, as part of a healthy diet.

“Color Your Plate” was developed from a similar program used by our military forces that helps current soldiers, airmen, marines and sailors choose healthier food options to allow them to perform at a higher level and stay healthier longer.

At the VAPAHCS Canteens, look specifically for the labeling at the Salad Bar, the Grill Line, Sandwich Line and more as time goes on. This simple labeling system is just another tool to help you manage your own health better. Bon appetite!



## Corn and Black Bean Burritos

These burritos are high in flavor and easy to make!

### Ingredients

- ¼ C scallions (green onions), rinsed and sliced into ¼-inch wide circles, including green tops
- ¼ C celery, rinsed and finely diced
- 1¼ C frozen yellow corn
- ½ ripe avocado, peeled and diced
- 2 Tbsp fresh cilantro, chopped (or substitute 2 tsp dried coriander)
- 1 can (15½ oz) black beans, drained and rinsed
- ¼ C reduced-fat shredded cheddar cheese
- ¼ C salsa or taco sauce (look for lowest sodium version)
- 12 (9-inch) whole-wheat tortillas



### Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 °F.
2. Combine scallions, celery, and corn in a small saucepan. Add just enough water to cover.
3. Cover, bring to a boil, and reduce heat to medium. Simmer for 5 minutes, until vegetables soften. Drain vegetables. Set aside to cool.
4. Combine avocado, cilantro, and beans in a large mixing bowl. Add cheese and salsa, and mix.
5. When corn mixture has cooled slightly, add to avocado mixture.
6. In a large nonstick pan over medium heat, warm each tortilla for about 15 seconds on each side. Place each tortilla on a flat surface. Spoon 1/3 cup of the mixture into the center of the tortilla. Fold the top and bottom of the tortilla over the filling. Fold in the sides to make a closed packet.
7. Repeat with the remaining tortillas.
8. When all tortillas are wrapped, continue heating in the oven 5 minutes, until all are warm and cheese is melted.
9. Tip: Try serving with extra salsa on the side

**Prep time: 20 minutes**

**Cook time: 5 minutes**

**Yield: 12 servings**

**Serving size: 1 burrito**

### Each serving provides:

Calories	189
Total fat	3 g
Saturated fat	0 g
Cholesterol	0 mg
Sodium	257 mg
Total fiber	3 g
Protein	8 g
Carbohydrates	34 g
Potassium	204 mg

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



## VA Palo Alto Health Care System Facilities

### VA PALO ALTO DIVISION

3801 Miranda Avenue  
Palo Alto, CA 94304  
(650) 493-5000

### VA LIVERMORE DIVISION

4951 Arroyo Road  
Livermore, CA 94550  
(925) 373-4700

### VA MENLO PARK DIVISION

795 Willow Road  
Menlo Park, CA 94025  
(650) 493-5000

### VA CAPITOLA OPC

1350 N. 41st Street,  
Suite 102  
Capitola, CA 95010  
(831) 464-5519

### VA FREMONT OPC

39199 Liberty Street  
Fremont, CA 94538  
(510) 791-4000

### VA MODESTO OPC

1225 Oakdale Road  
Modesto, CA 95355  
(209) 557-6200

### VA MONTEREY OPC

3401 Engineer Lane  
Seaside, CA 93955  
(831) 883-3800

### VA SAN JOSE OPC

80 Great Oaks Boulevard  
San Jose, CA 95119  
(408) 363-3000

### VA SONORA OPC

13663 Mono Way  
Sonora, CA 95370  
(209) 588-2600

### VA STOCKTON OPC

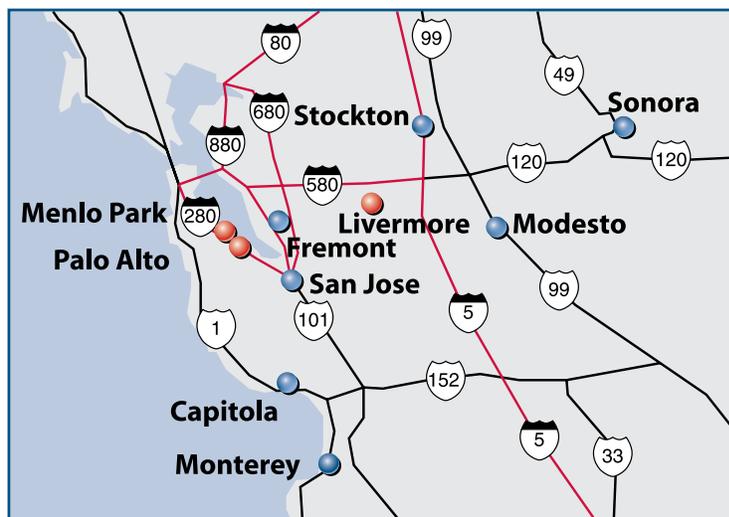
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[www.paloalto.va.gov](http://www.paloalto.va.gov)

To access past issues of the To Your Health newsletter, please visit [www.paloalto.va.gov/To\\_Your\\_Health.asp](http://www.paloalto.va.gov/To_Your_Health.asp).

You can also access the Veterans Health Library (VHL) by going to [www.veteranshealthlibrary.org](http://www.veteranshealthlibrary.org) or on My HealthVet at [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov).



 VA Palo Alto Health Care System Division

 VA Palo Alto Health Care System Community Based Outpatient Clinic

## Smoking and Health:

# Make the Quit Today!

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Surgeon General's first Report on Smoking and Health. The report, released in 1964 by Surgeon General Dr. Luther Terry, was the first federal government report linking smoking to health outcomes such as lung cancer and heart disease. Since then, 31 more Surgeon General's reports have been released, further increasing our understanding of the tremendous burden tobacco use has on our health. We know smoking causes a number of illnesses, yet 50 years later it remains the leading preventable cause of death in the United States.

If you would like help to stop smoking, VA Palo Alto Health Care System can help. There are three stop smoking clinics in the Palo Alto Health Care System.

## Tips for Healthy Living



Self referrals are accepted. Nicotine patches and other medications are available. Regular visits are expected, so it is best to pick a clinic closest to your home.

**Palo Alto Division: Call (650) 493-5000**

**San Jose Out Patient Clinic: Call (408) 363-3000**

**Stockton: Call (209) 946-3407**

If you leave a message be sure to include your name, last four numbers of your social security number, and the best way to reach you. If you are unable to come in to clinic, you may self-refer to TeleQuit, the telephone smoking cessation program. Just call 650-493-5000, ext. 60557.

