

to your

Health!



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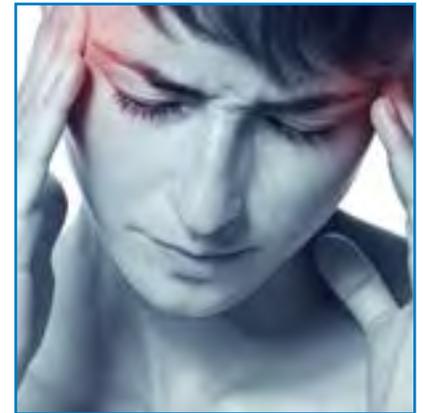
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Can I Manage My Pain Without My Medication?

Roshan Luke, RD, Nutrition and Food Service; Alisa Krinsky, MS, CTRS, Recreation Therapy; Hank Winkenwerder, PT, Physical Therapy

Many veterans suffer from chronic pain. Although it can feel like you're the only one who has experienced this, you are not alone or without resources. In fact, at least 76 million Americans have chronic pain according to the American Pain Society. Managing a constant, serious problem takes a more involved approach than a simple "ignore it and take this pill" approach.



See Manage My Pain – page 2



Medications and the Sun: Avoiding Sunburn this Summer



Wing Chi Wong, PharmD., Pharmacy

Summer is here and many of us are planning to enjoy the warm weather and spend a day or two outdoors. But before you head to the beach, did you know that some medications you may be taking can cause a side effect called photosensitivity? Photosensitivity means your skin can be more sensitive to the sun and more likely to get sunburned. Common medications that are used for infections, high blood pressure, and irregular heart beat can have this side effect. Please check your list of medications and compare it with the list of medications on page 6. If you are on one of these medications, you should be more careful with protecting

your skin against the sun. These medications can make your skin burn more quickly, so even a short period of time in the sun can put you at risk. Tips for protecting your skin include: applying sunscreen often (especially if you will be in the water), wearing long sleeve shirts and pants, and staying in the shade when possible. If you develop a sunburn, call the advice nurse or get it checked by your provider. Even if you are not on one of these medications, still consider the tips above to help keep your skin safe from the sun. Too much exposure to the sun and frequent sunburns can increase your chance of getting skin cancer.

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Over the past 40 years, doctors have broadened their practice to accept and recommend other treatments in addition to or instead of medications to treat disease and pain.

This is especially important as we recognize the limitations of medications like Vicodin in treating pain. If there are other ways to decrease pain, we can take less medication (and risk fewer side effects) or eliminate some drugs for pain completely.

The VA has many options to help you with your pain. One such alternative approach to help reduce pain is Ai Chi. It was developed in Japan and based on Qigong and T'ai Chi Chuan, and it has some similarities to Yoga.

The essence of Ai Chi is basic breathing techniques combined with gentle movements in a progression from upper body, trunk, to lower body, and finally to a full body movement. Ai Chi is done in chest-high, warm water using progressive resistance, combined with slow, deep breathing.

Another option is T'ai Chi. T'ai chi was initially designed as a martial art in China. This exercise focus on slow, gentle movement with a focus on breathing. With this exercise the body is always in constant movement. The movements are low impact and aerobic.

Another option is yoga, an activity that is based on three main parts. The parts are exercise, breathing and mediation. There are many types of yoga, but the basic core parts are the same.

These exercises can help with balance, flexibility, muscle strength, stiffness, sleep, stress management and circulation.

Exercise is only one part of a pain management plan. Another part of the plan is making behavior changes. Simple changes might be getting a good night's sleep, not arguing with your spouse, weight loss (if you are overweight) or weight gain (if you are underweight), quitting smoking, eating healthy and taking a vitamin D supplement if your blood levels are low. Your provider can let you know if your vitamin D levels are low.

For healthy eating try using whole grains in your cooking, eating fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables with meals, using good fats (olive oil, canola oil), adding beans and legumes to meals and drinking at least 6-8 cups of water daily.

Chronic pain can be managed, you do not have to simply "ignore it and take this pill". All the options outlined in this article are available through the VA. Please speak with your provider so you can be referred to one or more of these classes.



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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MOVE! Coach - Gets You Moving When and Where You Want!

Lin Wan, PharmD., Pharmacy

MOVE! Coach is a phone app (application) that offers a new way to participate in MOVE! - VA's successful weight management program. It's an easy-to-use, self-guided program that provides everything you need to set, track, and achieve your diet, physical activity, and weight goals. The app walks you through a series of self management guides, for a total of 19 weeks of care. MOVE! Coach offers a portable new way for you to participate in MOVE!—when and where you want! It can also help your provider partner with you to achieve your health and weight goals. It is now available for free on iPhone or iPad devices with iOS version 6.0 or higher and may be downloaded from the Apple app store.

MOVE! Coach provides a series of 11 self-management guides that include educational videos, games, and worksheets. These guides help you to set your weight management

Hypoglycemia Safety Initiative

Whitney Wang, PharmD, Pharmacy

Do you have diabetes? Does your blood sugar sometimes go too low? To reduce dangerous low blood sugars and improve patient safety at the VA has started the Hypoglycemia Safety Initiative. Keeping diabetes well controlled can prevent blindness, nerve pain and kidney failure. Good diabetes control in the early years of the disease can lower the risk of heart disease and stroke. Having good control in the early years can give benefits even years later. But it's a fine balance to keep the blood sugar from going too low.

The blood test called hemoglobin A1c, or just A1c, measures your average blood sugar for the past 3 months. If you've had diabetes for more than 10 or 15 years, your A1c goal may be different than it used to be. Research in the past few years shows that for some patients, keeping blood sugars quite low can actually lead to a higher rate of problems such as heart disease, stroke, and even death. For elderly people this can be a particular problem because of risks such as kidney disease or memory problems.

What is Hypoglycemia?

Hypoglycemia means low blood sugar, usually a blood sugar level less than 70 mg/dL. This can happen if you are on insulin or a sulfonylurea (glipizide or glyburide) Your blood sugar can go too low if you are using insulin or a sulfonylurea, skip meals or do not eat enough. This can also happen when you give yourself too much insulin or sulfonylurea. Hypoglycemia can be dangerous. When your blood sugar is low, you may feel shaky, weak, sweaty or hungry. You might also feel lightheaded or just have an odd feeling of "not being right." Sometimes people can have low blood sugar and NOT feel it, which is called hypoglycemia unawareness -this is dangerous too.

Why is Low Blood Sugar Dangerous?

Low blood sugar can cause dizziness, fainting, seizure, falls, and accidents. It can also stress your heart, and may even lead to death. Repeated episodes of hypoglycemia can lead to hypoglycemia unawareness. Your body or brain can no longer give you signals to warn you that you may have low blood sugar. Not being aware of having low blood sugar can be life-threatening and should be avoided.

What Should My Hemoglobin A1c Goal Be?

You may have been told that your A1c target should be less than 7%. However, an A1c goal of less than 7% may not be right for every patient. Your A1c goal may be more relaxed depending on your risk for having low blood sugar. Having a higher A1c may be appropriate if you've had diabetes for

many years or have certain other medical problems. Talk with your provider or care team to see if your current A1c goal is right for you.

What Are Ways To Prevent Hypoglycemia?

- Avoid skipping meals or not eating enough
- Take your meal-time insulin or sulfonylurea (glipizide or glyburide) within 30 minutes of your meal
- Avoid taking extra insulin or sulfonylurea by keeping a medication log or using a pill box
- Avoid exercising more than usual without making a change in your diet or diabetes medications

What Are Ways To Treat Hypoglycemia?

If your blood sugar is less than 70 mg/dL or if you cannot check but feel that your blood sugar is low:

- Take 15 grams of fast-acting sugar, such as 4 glucose tablets, a 10 oz. glass of skim milk, or a 1/2 cup of juice. AVOID eating candy bars or chocolate because they do not work fast enough to increase the sugar in your blood. Wait 15 minutes then check your blood sugar again.

If your sugar does not increase to above 70 mg/dL even after taking more than 15 grams of fast-acting sugar every 15 minutes for 3 times, call 911!

What are signs and symptoms of low blood sugar?

- Shakiness
- Fast heart rate
- Impaired vision
- Hunger
- Headache
- Irritability
- Weakness or fatigue
- Anxious
- Dizziness
- Sweatiness





Serving LGBT Veterans with PRIDE

Kathleen Thomas, LISW-S, Social Work

The VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS) is honored to serve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Veterans. Nation-wide, there are an estimated one million LGBT Service Members and Veterans. Throughout history, LGBT Service Members and Veterans have made significant (and often unknown) contributions to the US Military. Did you know General Baron von Steuben, a gay man, was hired by General George Washington to organize the US colonies into a single uniform military? He is credited for the success of the American Revolution. His efforts were so effective that his tombstone reads “Indispensable to the Achievement of American Independence.” LGBT Veterans have also made contributions to civilian society. It was Gilbert Baker, a gay Veteran in San Francisco who designed the Rainbow Pride Flag used throughout the world today.

As an LGBT Veteran, you may face unique health related issues due to the stress of war and the former Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Policy. LGBT Veterans have higher rates of smoking, fewer preventive screenings, and higher rates of mental health challenges. Unfortunately, stigma and fear of discrimination keep some LGBT people from seeking medical and mental health care. VAPAHCS recognizes that having faced anti-LGBT discrimination in civilian and military communities, many LGBT Veterans also develop unique forms of strength and resilience.

To address these experiences, VA Palo Alto Health Care System’s LGBT Program provides resources and support to both LGBT Veterans and VA Staff. LGBT Veterans are invited to participate in a weekly support group. Here, you can discuss your needs, strengths, and life goals among LGBT Veteran peers in an open and supporting environment. Topics of discussion include coming out to medical providers, creating healthy relationships, reducing isolation and developing pride in an LGBT Veteran identity.

VAPAHCS supports LGBT Veteran’s access to nonjudgmental quality care. The Safe Space Campaign trains staff to create an environment where discrimination is not tolerated and human diversity is valued. VAPAHCS LGBT Programs for Veterans and Staff have been recognized for leadership in Health Care Equality.

At VAPAHCS, we look forward to providing you with the high quality, individualized care every Veteran deserves. If you have further questions about the VAPAHCS LGBT Veteran Support Group please contact Gabriel Lonero (Gabriel.Lonero@va.gov). If you would like to learn about the Special Emphasis Program for Staff, please contact Kathleen Thomas (Kathleen.Thomas2@va.gov).



MOVE!— continued from page 2

goals and track your progress using built-in self-monitoring tools. Using the app, you will be able to monitor your food intake, physical activity, and weight—an evidence-based practice that’s important to successful weight management.

MOVE! Coach provides the following features and benefits:

- 11 specialized guides to help you manage your weight and get healthier
- Daily diaries for tracking how much you weigh, what you eat, and how much exercise you are getting
- Tools to help you set and meet your personal goals for weight, diet, and physical activity
- Personalized graphs for tracking your long-term and daily weight loss, daily food intake, calories, and physical activity
- Educational videos—including 11 on physical activity—and a variety of games and worksheets make it easier for you to succeed
- Daily diary to help you track how much you weigh, what you eat, and how much exercise you’re getting

- Calculators to determine how many calories you consume and burn
- Progress and summary reports to help you keep track of your goals
- Problem-solving-tools help guide you past common weight management challenges
- Links to additional handouts that provide even more information to help you succeed

To download the MOVE! Coach app:

*from the iTunes store, use this link

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/id878356988?mt=8>

OR

*from the Apple App Store by selecting the “iPhone Only” filter, and searching for “move coach” in the search box.

Now, start moving for a healthier you!



Healthy Recipes

Apple, Fennel & Chicken Salad with Couscous

A refreshing, crunchy, sweet-savory salad featuring a play of fresh chopped apples, fennel and chicken breast blended with whole wheat couscous and spinach, then topped with lemon balsamic vinaigrette.

Ingredients

- 1 cup onion (finely chopped)
- 12 ounces boneless chicken breast (2-3 breasts)
- 3 tablespoons olive oil (divided)
- 1 cup whole wheat couscous
- 2 medium red apples
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice (divided)
- 1 fennel bulb
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 3 ounces Fresh Baby Spinach (about 3.5 cups)
- 2 tablespoons walnuts (chopped, may use pecans or almonds)



Directions

1. Slice chicken breasts crosswise into 1/2" strips.
2. Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in large skillet over medium heat.
3. Add chicken, cook 8-10 minutes until done, stirring occasionally, remove from heat.
4. While chicken is sauteing, cook couscous according to package directions, let cool.
5. Core and chop apples, place in large bowl; toss with 1 tablespoon lemon juice.
6. Chop fennel bulb (discarding stem and fronds) and add to bowl.
7. In a small bowl, whisk remaining oil and lemon juice with balsamic vinegar, sugar, salt, and pepper.
8. Add chicken, couscous, spinach, and nuts to bowl with apples and fennel.
9. Drizzle with dressing, toss to coat, and serve.
10. Can be made several hours ahead and refrigerated.

Each Serving Provides:

Calories	440
Total Fat	16 g
Protein	25 g
Carbohydrates	56 g
Dietary Fiber	6 g
Saturated Fat	2 g
Sodium	260 mg

Prep Time: 30 minutes

Makes: 4 Servings

Source: <http://www.whatscooking.fns.usda.gov/>



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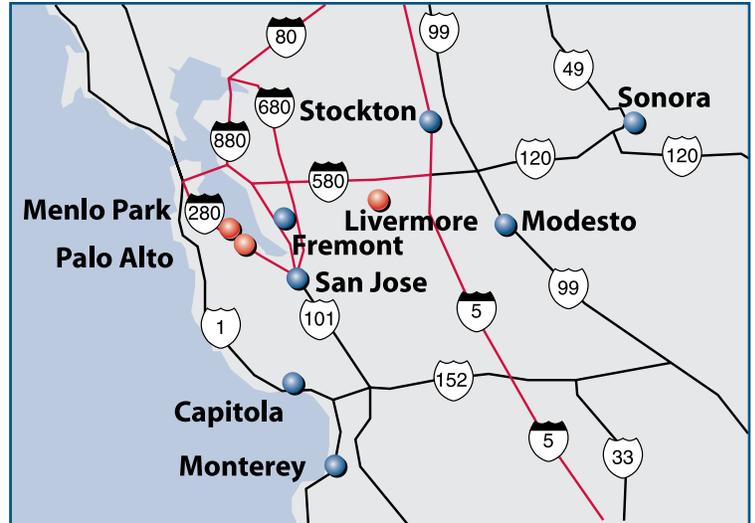
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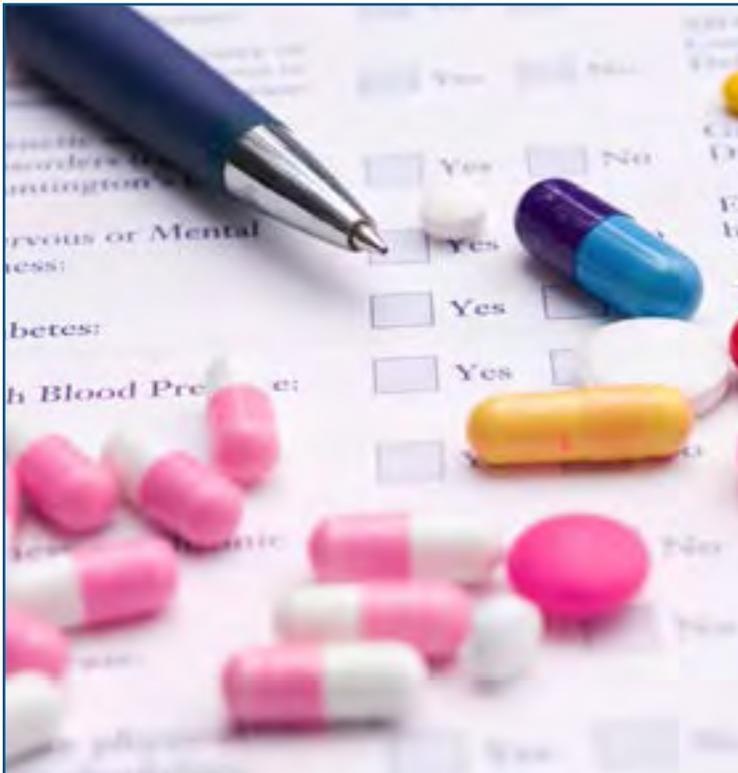
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 VA Palo Alto Health Care System Division

 VA Palo Alto Health Care System Community Based Outpatient Clinic

Medications – continued from page 1



This is only a short list of common medications that cause increased sensitivity to the sun. There are other medications not on this list that can have the same effect. Please check with your provider or your pharmacist if you have questions or concerns.

Common Medications that Can Cause Photosensitivity

- Antibiotics
 - Ciprofloxacin
 - Levofloxacin
 - Moxifloxacin
 - Doxycycline
 - Tetracycline
 - Sulfamathoxazole/Trimethoprim
 - Voriconazole
- Heart and Blood Pressure Medications
 - Hydrochlorothiazide
 - Chlorthalidone
 - Amiodarone
- And other medications: check with your provider or pharmacist