

to your

Health!

VA PAHCS
Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System • Veterans Health Education Newsletter • Fall 2016 • Volume 19 • Issue 4

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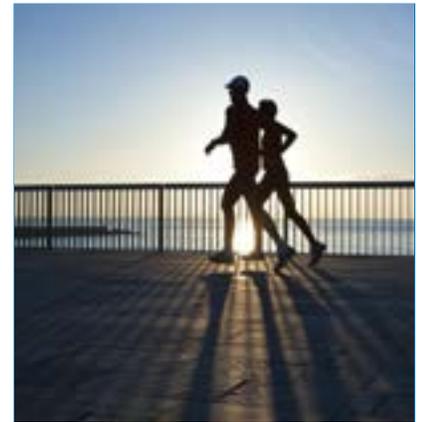
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Health and Wellness Website at VA Palo Alto

Serena Gray, RN, Health Promotion & Disease Prevention Coordinator

Ever wonder what patient education classes VA Palo Alto offers? VA Palo Alto cares for over 60,000 Veterans at 10 locations. We have a lot to offer, but sometimes it is hard to figure out what classes or activities are available and where. Now there is an easy way for you to explore the classes offered.

A new website lets you know about the health classes and



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Dehydration in the Elderly: Risks and Prevention

Caroline Ha, Pharm.D., Pharmacy Service



Your body is made up of 75% water and fluids. Keeping a good balance of water and other fluids is important so that your body can work the way it should. When your body does not have enough water and fluids, you become dehydrated. Dehydration is a common problem as people get older.

What Causes Dehydration?

Losing too much water and/or not drinking enough fluids can both lead to dehydration.

- **Diarrhea:** Water is absorbed from your gut. When you have diarrhea, your gut cannot absorb as much water.

- **Vomiting:** You lose fluids when you throw up. Because you are nauseous, it is even harder to drink water or other types of drinks to replace the water you lost.
- **Diabetes:** Extremely high blood sugar can lead to urinating more frequently. This is because your body is trying to get rid of the extra sugar. But this increases water loss too.
- **Medications:** You may be taking water pills to treat medical problems. However, if the dose of the water pill is too high, you can lose too much water. Examples of

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- water pills include furosemide, torsemide, hydrochlorothiazide, and spironolactone.

Some older people are dehydrated because they have no access to water or other drinks. They may also have a hard time figuring out if they are thirsty. In these cases, it is best for family members, friends, and caregivers to monitor the person closely.

These are just some of the most common causes of dehydration, but how do you know when you or your family member are dehydrated?

What are the Symptoms of Dehydration?

The severity of dehydration depends on how much water and fluids you lost. There is mild, moderate, and severe dehydration.

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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Mild Dehydration

- Feeling Thirsty
- Darker Urine Color
- Decreased Urination

Moderate Dehydration

- Dry Mouth
- Very Tired and Lethargic
- Dizziness (especially when standing)
- Headache

Severe Dehydration

- Low Blood Pressure
- Very Fast Heart Rate
- Sunken Eyes
- No Urination or Tears
- Fainting, Losing Consciousness



Preventing Dehydration

It is important to maintain hydration – or enough water and fluids in your body – to keep your body working properly. While there are ways to treat dehydration, the best thing to do is to not let it happen in the first place!

- Drink water! This is especially important if you are doing outdoor activities in hot weather, when you will be sweating a lot more. Remember to bring extra water when you're hiking, running, and just being in the sun so that you can replace the water that you lost.
- Avoid caffeinated drinks! Try to avoid fluids that will cause you to lose water. Caffeinated drinks, such as coffee and sodas, will lead to more frequent urination and water loss. Too much alcohol can also lead to increased urination.
- Avoid extreme heat! If you are outdoors, rest in shady areas. Try to avoid doing outdoor activities during the hottest part of the day.
- Take your medications as directed! If you are taking water pills, be sure to take only the amount that your provider tells you to. If you have heart failure and may gain water weight, speak to your provider about what to do.

While drinking a lot of water and fluids is important to keep yourself hydrated, this is not always the best approach for some patients. If you have heart failure or kidney disease, it is best to speak with your provider about the amount of fluids you can drink every day.



Depression: What It Is and What to Do About It

Elaine Savoy, Ph.D., Psychology Postdoctoral Fellow and Carey A. Pawlowski, Ph.D., ABPP Board Certified Rehabilitation Psychologist

What is Depression?

Depression is a common medical condition that affects mood. It can be identified by signs including low energy and decreased activity. Depression can affect how you feel, think, and act. Each person may have very different signs of depression. While you may feel sad and have trouble getting out of bed, someone else may feel restless and cannot focus.

About 15.7 million adults are diagnosed with at least one major case of depression each year. About one in three Veterans visiting primary care clinics has some sign of depression. One in eight Veterans meets the criteria for a diagnosis of major depression and needs treatment with counseling and/or medications.

With so many people affected, how do you know if you may be depressed? Below is a list of common symptoms.

Signs of Depression

- Feeling sad or down most of the day
- Feeling tired or having low energy almost all the time
- Feeling guilty or useless
- Having a hard time focusing
- Having a hard time sleeping or sleeping too much
- Losing interest in hobbies, work, school, or other things one used to enjoy or care about
- Thoughts of death, suicide, or that life is not worth living
- Feeling either uneasy or slowed down
- Gaining or losing weight without meaning to
- Ignoring own safety or poor self-care
- Becoming more distant from friends and family
- Being more irritable

Ways to Fight Depression

Sadly, depression is a medical condition that often goes without being treated. People might feel ashamed, not recognize the signs, or have trouble sharing their concerns with their



providers. Depression is not a weakness, and you cannot simply "snap out" of it. When depression is left not treated, it can worsen and take longer to get better. Since early action makes a difference, what is the next step?

The good news is that depression can be treated. If you think you may have depression, one of the first steps is to schedule a visit to talk to your medical provider. Your medical provider will decide if your symptoms are caused by depression or by another condition. Checking your physical health is important for finding the cause of your symptoms as well as taking care of yourself.

Once your physical health is checked, talking with a psychologist or licensed clinical social worker can be very helpful to manage your depression. There are a variety of therapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), or behavioral activation to help you deal with depression in a healthy way. You might choose to meet with a psychiatrist as well. There are a number of medications which you can discuss with your provider to help treat your symptoms. Combining medications with counseling or therapy can also be very beneficial.

Another way of handling depression is to become more active. There has been a lot of research lately showing the benefit of physical activity to help with mood. Whether it is moving your body or being with others, choose something you like or value, and something that works for you. For instance, if you avoid going on bike rides because you feel nervous about balancing or it seems too hard, choosing a short daily walk might be better. Fun activities have a better chance of lowering symptoms of depression and are more likely to be continued in the future.

Note that it is normal to feel depressed from time to time, especially after sad events. Feelings, including sad ones, are not bad. However, if you are worried that your feelings are becoming hard to manage or causing you distress and suffering, seeking help is not only a reasonable choice, it is a healthy one.

For more information or help, please check out the following tools:

Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 or

<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>

<http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/depression.asp>

<http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/gethelp.asp>



Organic Food or Non-Organic Food? That is the Question

Eileen Stein, MS, RD, Clinical Nutrition Manager

Everywhere you look, it seems, there are signs for organic foods. For those old enough to remember the 1970's and 1980's, organic food were usually limited to health food stores and maybe one small section of the large grocery stores. Now, every grocery store has at least some organic foods, and many have almost entirely organic foods.

The question still remains, though – is organic food better or healthier? Should you be buying it?

What does organic mean?

When foods are labeled as organic, that means it is grown and processed in ways that preserve resources (such as water and soil) and decrease pollution. Foods labeled with the USDA Organic label meet strict guidelines about growing, handling, and processing.

Organic fruits and vegetables are grown without the use of conventional or synthetic pesticides. While both organic and non-organic foods have pesticide levels well below the allowable limit, organic produce usually has lower levels.

Pros and Cons of Organic Foods

There are a few studies that have looked at the nutritional value of organic versus non-organic foods. Some of the studies show higher levels of vitamins and minerals (about 10 – 30% higher in some cases). For example, a conventional orange has 60 mg of vitamin C, while an organic one may have 72 mg of vitamin C. While that may not be dramatic, it can add up. Packaged foods labeled as organic have fewer food additives (like preservatives, artificial colors, or artificial flavors). Many feel that fewer preservatives and additives is the healthier way to go.

There are some drawbacks to going organic, however. Organic food tends to be more expensive, especially fruits and vegetables. Also, because organic produce is not treated with any kind of preservatives, it tends to go bad more quickly.

So what should you do?

As with many issues, there is no right or wrong answer when looking at organic foods. Even nutrition professionals have different ideas about how important it is to buy organic. Most of the dietitians at Palo Alto VA recently polled say that they do try to buy organic when it comes to the “Dirty Dozen” (see chart on right). These are foods which have the highest levels of pesticides. The “Clean Fifteen” have the lowest levels.

Some important things to remember when looking at your shopping habits are:

- Buy whatever fruits and vegetables fit in your budget. If you can afford organic, especially for those on the Dirty Dozen list, go for it.
- Don't give up on fresh fruits and veggies if you can't afford organic. Even the non-organic produce will provide you with vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fiber. It's all good!
- Buy fruits and vegetables that are in season. These will have the lowest cost and will have the most nutrients. Check out your local farmer's market if you don't know what is in season.
- Whatever produce you get, organic or conventional, wash it well! This can be especially important with organic produce, which may use fertilizers you don't want to eat!
- When comparing an organic, packaged snack to a non-organic piece of fruit, don't get caught up in the idea that only organic foods are good. A conventional apple is still better for you than organic potato chips!

The Dirty Dozen Plus (buy organic, if you can)

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| • Strawberries | • Spinach |
| • Apples | • Tomatoes |
| • Nectarines | • Sweet Bell Peppers |
| • Peaches | • Cherry Tomatoes |
| • Celery | • Cucumbers |
| • Grapes | • Hot Peppers |
| • Cherries | • Kale/Collard Greens |

The Clean Fifteen (conventional/non-organic is fine)

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| • Avocado | • Papayas |
| • Sweet corn | • Kiwi |
| • Pineapple | • Eggplant |
| • Cabbage | • Honeydew melon |
| • Sweet peas (frozen) | • Grapefruit |
| • Onions | • Cantaloupe |
| • Asparagus | • Cauliflower |
| • Mangoes | |

Source: Environmental Working Groups, 2016; <https://www.ewg.org/foodnews/>



Mashed Potatoes Make Over

Skinny Buttermilk Mashed Potatoes

Ingredients

- 6-7 Yukon Gold Potatoes 2 lbs
- 2 Tbsp low fat buttermilk 3/4 cup
- light butter 1 Tbsp
- fresh chives 1 1/4 cup
- salt and pepper to taste

Directions

- 1.) Put potatoes in a large pot with salt and enough water to cover.
- 2.) Bring to a boil. Cover and reduce heat. Simmer for 20 minutes or until potatoes are tender.
- 3.) Drain and return potatoes to the pot.
- 4.) Add buttermilk, light butter and remaining ingredients.
- 5.) Mash until smooth.
- 6.) Season with salt and pepper to taste.



Each Serving Provides:

Calories	150.1
Total Fat	1.6g
Sodium	63.1mg
Protein	4.8 g
Carbohydrates	31.2g
Total Sugars	3.2g

Yields: 5 Servings

Serving Size: 3/4 Cups

Source: Recipe courtesy of MOVE cookbook 

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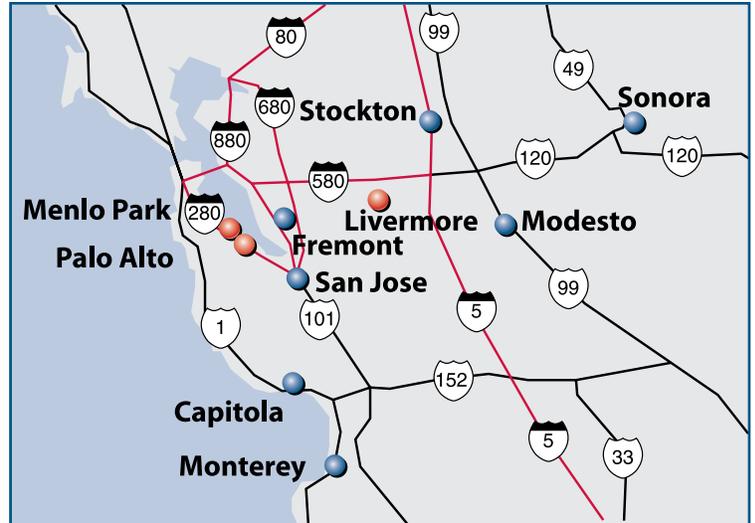
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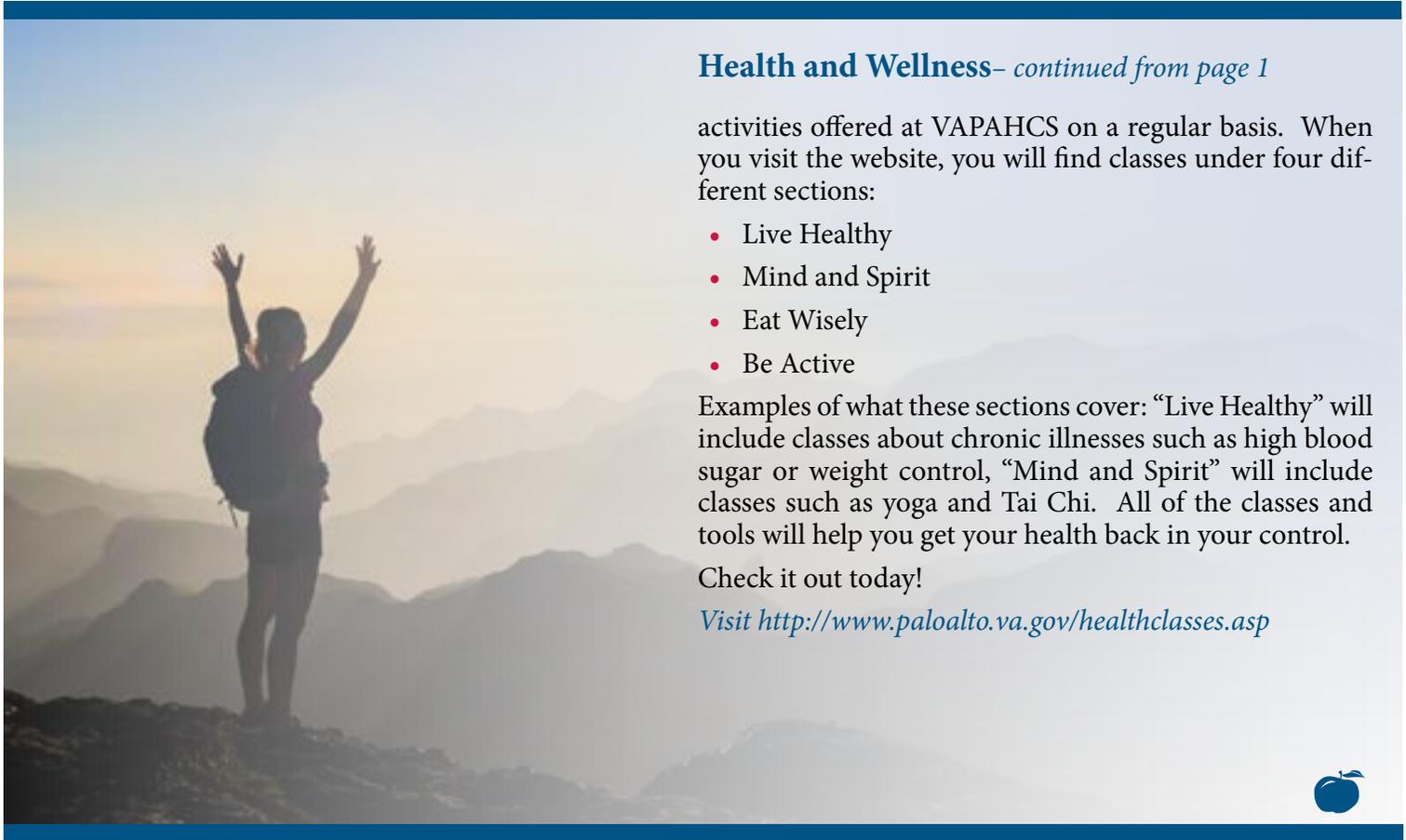
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To access past issues of the To Your Health newsletter, please visit www.paloalto.va.gov/To_Your_Health.asp. You can also access the Veterans Health Library (VHL) by going to www.veteranshealthlibrary.org or on My HealthVet at www.myhealth.va.gov.



 **VA Palo Alto Health Care System Division**

 **VA Palo Alto Health Care System Community Based Outpatient Clinic**



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activities offered at VAPAHCS on a regular basis. When you visit the website, you will find classes under four different sections:

- Live Healthy
- Mind and Spirit
- Eat Wisely
- Be Active

Examples of what these sections cover: “Live Healthy” will include classes about chronic illnesses such as high blood sugar or weight control, “Mind and Spirit” will include classes such as yoga and Tai Chi. All of the classes and tools will help you get your health back in your control.

Check it out today!

Visit <http://www.paloalto.va.gov/healthclasses.asp>

