

Veterans' Health Today

SUMMER 2004

Protect
Your Eyes

Veterans
Health Care is a
Valuable Benefit

Water Safety

Are You Heading
for a Fall?

VA DESERT PACIFIC
HEALTHCARE NETWORK



Department of
Veterans Affairs



Getting the word out...

Veterans health care is a valuable benefit

Many veterans still don't know they're eligible for VA health care, especially low income, service-connected or recently returned combat veterans. VA medical center staff are trying to get the word out to all veterans. "VA health care

is a benefit that veterans earned when they served their country on active duty and we just want to make sure they know this benefit is here for them," said Bill Keating, enrollment coordinator for the VA San Diego Healthcare System. VA staff are manning health information booths and providing information to veteran service officers and other community agencies which are trying to get the word out to California and Nevada veterans.

VA offers comprehensive health care on an inpatient and outpatient basis. "We offer everything from medical, surgical, rehabilitation, women's health and psychiatric care to homeless programs and spinal cord injury care," said Ken Clark, Network Director for the Desert Pacific Healthcare Network. "In addition to being the largest health care system in the nation, we also have clinical quality scores that

surpass both Medicare and non-VA provider scores.

"We have also made tremendous strides in reducing wait times for appointments and improving patient satisfaction scores. Our wait times for new appointments in primary care are within 30 days or less," said Clark.

To enroll, veterans can visit their local VA medical center or download an application form (1010EZ) from the VA website: www.va.gov. There is no annual premium and co-payments are affordable. Based on service-connected status and income level, some veterans will have their co-payments waived. For more information on VA health benefits, or to enroll for care, please call your local VA medical center.



Understanding VA Eligibility

Veteran eligibility is based on the information contained in the completed VA application. The veterans are assigned a specific eligibility status and priority group ranging from 1 through 8, with Priority Group 1 being the highest priority and Priority Group 8 the lowest. Although there are many exceptions, the groups include:

★Priority Group 1

Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 50% or more disabling.

★Priority Group 2

Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 30% or 40% disabling.

★Priority Group 3

Veterans who were POWs, awarded the Purple Heart, discharged for a disability that was incurred or aggravated in the line of duty, rated as 10% or 20% service-connected, awarded special eligibility for individuals disabled by treatment or vocational rehabilitation.

★Priority Group 4

Veterans who are receiving aid and attendance or housebound benefits or those who have been determined to be catastrophically disabled.

★Priority Group 5

Nonservice-connected veterans and noncompensable service-connected veterans rated 0% disabled whose annual income and

net worth are below the established VA Means Test thresholds. Veterans receiving VA pension benefits or are eligible for Medicaid benefits.

★Priority Group 6

Compensable 0% service-connected veterans, World War I veterans, Mexican Border War veterans and veterans seeking care solely for disorders associated with their service such as exposure to herbicides, ionizing radiation, Gulf War illnesses.

★Priority Group 7

Veterans who agree to pay specified co-payments with income and/or net worth ABOVE the VA Means Test and income BELOW the geographically based threshold for their locality.

★Priority Group 8

Veterans who enrolled before January 16, 2003 and agree to pay specified co-payments with income and/or net worth ABOVE the VA Means Test threshold and income ABOVE the geographically-based threshold for their locality

We welcome returning Active Duty, National Guard and Reserve service members of

Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and other theaters of operation.

We honor the opportunity to provide benefits information and assistance to eligible veterans who honorably fought and served in our Nation's armed forces. Please visit our website at www.vbs.va.gov/EFIF/ or contact your local VA facility

Water Safety Tips

During summer, many of us want to spend time near the water, whether at the backyard swimming pool or at a favorite beach. We associate water and water activities with fun. In order to make sure that playing at the beach or pool stays fun, follow some simple water safety rules.

- 💧 Learn to swim. The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water is to learn to swim. Always swim with a buddy; never swim alone.
- 💧 Watch out for the “dangerous too’s”—too tired, too cold, too far from safety, too much sun, too much strenuous activity.
- 💧 Obey all rules and posted signs.
- 💧 Don’t mix alcohol and swimming. Alcohol impairs your judgment, balance, and coordination, affects your swimming and diving skills, and reduces your body’s ability to stay warm.
- 💧 Drink plenty of water regularly and often even if you do not feel thirsty. Your body needs water to keep cool.
- 💧 Never leave a child unobserved around water. Your eyes must be on the child at all times. Adult supervision is essential.
- 💧 Pay attention to local weather conditions and forecasts. Stop swimming at the first indication of bad weather.
- 💧 Know how to prevent, recognize, and respond to emergencies.

Following these simple rules, you and your family and friends can have a wonderful time in the water.

Adopted from American Red Cross



Yearly eye exams offer the best protection for your eyes

Although we don't like to admit it, our eyesight begins to change as we get older. We have to hold the newspaper a little closer, the fine print gets even finer, and we are not as comfortable driving after dark as we were when we were younger. In fact, according to Dr. Steven Ferrucci, of the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, almost all of us will eventually need reading glasses. Dealing with vision changes might also mean changing our home or office lighting or – in the case of more serious problems – even surgery.

The number of aging Americans with common age-related eye diseases has increased significantly in recent years. A study done by Duke University recently discovered that the percentage of elderly Americans with macular degeneration, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy and/or glaucoma – the four most common age-related eye diseases - was up over 32% from 1991 to 1999. Dr. Ferrucci adds that cataracts alone affect more than half of those over 65.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of blindness in those over the age of 55 in America. AMD is caused by the weakening or deterioration of the central part of the retina, which is the light-sensitive back layer of the eye. The retina records what we see and sends those images to the brain. The middle part of the retina, called the macula, focuses the central vision in the eye. It is this part that controls our ability to read

a newspaper, drive a car, and recognize faces and colors. A change in lifestyle, however, can help prevent or delay the disease.

“The number one modifiable risk factor in macular degeneration,” says Dr. Ferrucci, “is smoking.”

Another leading cause of blindness in Americans is diabetic retinopathy, a major complication of diabetes. Diabetes damages the tiny blood vessels inside the retina, eventually causing spots to form. It is estimated that between 40 to 45 percent of Americans diagnosed with diabetes have some stage of diabetic retinopathy. Because there are no early symptoms of the disease, a yearly exam with eye dilation is a must.

Glaucoma is actually a group of eye diseases which cause damage to the optic nerve from too much fluid pressure in the eye. They gradually steal sight without warning and often without symptoms. According to the Glaucoma Research Foundation, it is estimated that over 3 million Americans have glaucoma but only half of those know they have it. Early detection can help prevent irreversible vision loss.



Whatever our age, there are steps that can be taken to safeguard our eyesight:

1. Have a complete eye exam every one to two years. The exam should include putting eyedrops in your eyes to detect early signs or symptoms.
2. Find out if you are at high-risk for vision loss. A family history of diabetes or other eye diseases means you need to have a dilated eye exam every year.
3. See a physician at once if you have any loss or dimness of eyesight, any eye pain, fluid coming from the eye, double vision, redness, or swelling of your eye.

If you are already suffering from a loss of vision, there are some simple ideas that you can use to make living with the loss a little easier:

1. Write with bold, black felt-tip markers to make it easier to write and read.
2. Put colored tape on the edge of your steps to help you avoid a fall.
3. If you have light colored walls, install dark-colored light switches and electrical outlets so you can see the switches more easily.
4. To help prevent accidents caused by poor lighting, use motion lights that turn on automatically when you enter a room.
5. Buy telephones, clocks and watches with large numbers.
6. Put large-print labels on the microwave and stove to make it easier to find the correct buttons and dials to operate.
7. Also put large-print labels on the hot and cold handles of your faucets to help prevent accidental burns.

According to Dr. Ferrucci, the best way to prevent vision loss is to have a yearly comprehensive eye exam.

“Local VA Medical Centers offer comprehensive exams which check for diabetic retinopathy, cataracts, AMD and glaucoma,” says Ferrucci.

In addition, low vision services are available for those with severely reduced vision. Check with your personal care physician to find out if you are eligible for these services.



VA health care access and advice is just a phone call away 24 hours a day.....

VA TeleCare 1-877-252-4866

Call toll-free to speak with a nurse.

Completely free, confidential answers to your health care questions 24 hours a day.

Are You Heading for a Fall?



According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), about 12,000 mostly elderly Americans die each year as a result of falls and as our population ages, the number of deaths will continue to grow. CDC estimates that more than 33% of adults ages 65 years and older suffer a fall each year. More than 1.5 million seniors were treated in emergency rooms for fall-related injuries in 2001 alone. Clearly, falls are a serious health risk and expense. Are you at risk for falling? A partnership between health care professionals and you, the patient, can keep you from becoming a fall-related statistic.

What Your Health Care Professional Can Do

Because the number of fall-related injuries is growing, there is now a greater emphasis on prevention. Dr. Laurence Rubenstein, Director of the Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, has long been involved in studying fall-related risks. According to Rubenstein, there are three key ways that health care professionals can help reduce the number of falls.

1 The first key way to prevent or reduce falls is to do a periodic fall risk appraisal. The appraisal should assess your strength, balance, gait (how you walk), number and type of medications, history of previous falls, memory processes and whether or not you have had a general decline in the ability to function normally. Plans can then be made to reduce any identified risk factors.



2 The second way is to introduce you to a regular exercise program to strengthen the muscles (especially

the lower body muscles) and improve balance.

3 The third method should be an environmental inspection tied to making appropriate modifications. Ensuring that handrails are installed, improving lighting, checking for slippery surfaces, unstable furniture and loose rugs or carpet in your home can greatly reduce the chances a fall will happen.

Providing safe care for Veterans is our primary concern.



Please tell us your ideas for improving patient safety at your VA Medical Center.

Send an email message to VISN 22 Patient Safety, at
V22PatientSafety@med.va.gov



One-Stop Access for Veterans

Health Information

- VA Benefits
- Special Programs for Veterans
- Health Education Library
- Record Personal Health Information
- Latest Health News

On-line Patient Services

- Appointment Look-up
- Medication Refills
- Account Balances
- And Other Service



Log on to www.visn22.med.va.gov/

What You Can Do to Reduce Your Risk

While health care professionals can assess your risk of falling, there are many things you can do to ensure that you will not become a statistic.

- 1 Discuss your medications with your healthcare professional. It may be possible to reduce drug interactions which may affect balance and memory by switching medications.
- 2 If your physician puts you on an exercise program, follow it and keep following it. Try programs which emphasize balance, such as Tai Chi. Check with your local VA Medical Center for a full listing of the facilities available for exercise programs. According to Dr. Rubenstein, in addition to helping prevent falls, a regular exercise program can improve your quality of life, increase your functionality, strengthen your body and improve your mood.
- 3 Have your vision checked by a qualified professional at least once a year. Vision loss is often so gradual that you hardly notice it.
- 4 Use non-slip mats in your bathtub and shower floor. Use non-slip rugs on the bathroom floor.
- 5 Learn ways to get up without risk of further injury should you fall.
- 6 Don't wax floors. The surface may be too slippery to keep your balance.
- 7 Always clean up spills and fallen objects as soon as they happen. Don't risk tripping or slipping on them the next time you enter the room.
- 8 Reduce clutter in your home. The less clutter, the less likely you are to trip on an object in your way.
- 9 If you have increased dizziness or blurred vision, call your healthcare professional immediately. The problem could be drug interactions or a medical problem that can be easily corrected.
- 10 Light your stairways from top to bottom. Make certain there are no dark or blind spots where you cannot see the next step clearly.
- 11 Always wear low-heeled shoes with rubber soles for good traction.
- 12 Don't wear clothing that is so loose that it could easily cause you to trip.
- 13 Avoid alcohol or use only in moderation.

Are you headed for a fall? One fall may make the difference between living independently and relying on someone else for care. A few preventative measures, such as an exercise program, can ensure that you have a better chance of preventing that fall. More information on falls prevention is available at your local VA Medical Center. If you think you are at risk for a fall and would like a fall risk appraisal, check with your personal care physician.

Come visit us at: www.visn22.med.va.gov

VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network Vet Centers

Anaheim Vet Center

859 South Harbor Boulevard
Anaheim, CA 92805-5157
714-776-0161

Corona Vet Center

800 Magnolia Ave., Suite 110
Corona, CA 92879-3123
909-734-0525

East Los Angeles Vet Center

5400 E. Olympic Boulevard
Suite 140
Commerce, CA 90022-5147
323-728-9966

Las Vegas Vet Center

1040 E. Sahara Avenue, Suite 1
Las Vegas, NV 89503-3232
702-388-6369

Los Angeles Vet Center

1045 W. Redondo Beach Boulevard
Suite 150
Gardena, CA 90247-4129
310-767-1221

San Bernardino Vet Center

155 W. Hospitality Lane, Suite 140
San Bernardino, CA 92408-3315
619-294-2040

San Diego Vet Center

2900 Sixth Avenue
San Diego, CA 92103-1003
619-294-2040

Sepulveda Vet Center

9737 Haskell Avenue
Sepulveda, CA 91343-1618
818-892-9227

Ventura Vet Center

790 E. Santa Clara
Ventura, CA 93001-2964
805-585-1860

Vista Vet Center

1830 West Drive, Suites 103/104
Vista, CA 92083-6125
760-643-2070

West Los Angeles Vet Center

5730 Uplander Way, Suite 100
Culver City, CA 90230-6615
310-641-0326

REACHING US IS EASY

★ VA Medical Centers

VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System
P.O. Box 360001
Las Vegas, NV 89036
702-636-3000

Mike O'Callaghan Federal Hospital
4700 Las Vegas Boulevard North
Las Vegas, NV 89191
702-653-2215

VA Loma Linda Healthcare System
11201 Benton Street
Loma Linda, CA 92357
909-825-7084

VA Long Beach Healthcare System
5901 East Seventh Street
Long Beach, CA 90822
562-826-8000

VA San Diego Healthcare System
3350 La Jolla Village Drive
San Diego, CA 92161
858-552-8585

VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System
11301 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90073
310-478-3711

▲ Community Clinics

Anaheim
1801 W. Romneya Drive
3rd Floor, Suite 303
Anaheim, CA 92801
714-780-5400

Antelope Valley
547 W. Lancaster Blvd.
Lancaster, CA 93536
661-729-8655

Bakersfield
1801 Westwind Drive
Bakersfield, CA 93301
661-632-1800

Cabrillo
2001 River Avenue
Long Beach, CA 90806
562-388-8000

Chula Vista
835 3rd Avenue
Chula Vista, CA 91910
619-409-1600



Symbol Key

- ★ VA Medical Centers
- ▲ Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Corona
800 Magnolia Avenue #101
Corona, CA 92879
909-817-8820

East Los Angeles
5400 E. Olympic Boulevard #150
City of Commerce, CA 90040
323-725-7557

Escondido
815 East Pennsylvania Avenue
Escondido, CA 92025
760-466-7020

Gardena
1251 Redondo Beach Boulevard
3rd Floor
Gardena, CA 90247
310-851-4705

Henderson
2920 Green Valley Parkway,
Suite 215
Henderson, NV 89014
702-456-3825

Imperial Valley
528 G Street
Brawley, CA 92227
760-344-1881

Lancaster
547 W. Lancaster Blvd
Lancaster, CA 93534
661-729-8655

Las Vegas
MASH Village
1581 N. Main Street
Las Vegas, NV 89101
702-386-3140

Lompoc
1111 E. Ocean Avenue, Suite 8
Lompoc, CA 93436
805-736-7767

Los Angeles
351 E. Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
213-253-5000

Mission Valley
8810 Rio San Diego Drive
San Diego, CA 92108
619-400-5000

Oxnard
250 W. Citrus Grove Avenue
Suite 150
Oxnard, CA 93030
805-983-6384

Palm Desert
41-865 Boardwalk, Suite 103
Palm Desert, CA 92211
760-341-5570

Pahrump
2100 E. Calvada Boulevard
Pahrump, NV 89048
775-751-2053

Pasadena
1350 N. Altadena Dr.
Pasadena, CA 91007
626-296-9514

San Luis Obispo
1288 Moro St., #200
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
805-543-1233

Santa Ana
Bristol Medical Center
2740 S. Bristol Street
1st Floor, Suite 100
Santa Ana, CA 92704
714-825-3500

Santa Barbara
4440 Calle Real
Santa Barbara, CA 93110
805-683-1491

Sepulveda
16111 Plummer Street
Sepulveda, CA 91343
818-891-7711

South Los Angeles
3737 E. Martin Luther King Jr.
Blvd., Suite 515
Lynwood, CA 90262
1-800-455-0264

Sun City
28125 Bradley Road
Suite 130
Sun City, CA 92586
909-672-1931

Upland
1238 E. Arrow Highway,
No. 100
Upland, CA 91786
909-946-5348

Victorville
12138 Industrial Boulevard
Suite 120
Victorville, CA 92392
760-951-2599

Vista
1840 West Drive
Vista, CA 92083
760-643-2000

Whittier/Santa Fe Springs
10210 Orr and Day Road
Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670
562-864-5565

Veterans' Health Today
5901 E. 7th St.
Long Beach, CA 90822

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