

to your

# Health!

"Promoting Good Health Through Information"

Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System • Patient Education Newsletter • Spring 2003

## Being a Caregiver

Betty Wexler, CNS,  
GRECC Geriatric Clinic



Many people may find themselves as a caregiver for an aging relative, spouse, parent, or grandparent. Caregiving is a journey for which you may not be prepared. However, the caregiver role can be made easier as you begin to take action and gather information about your role.

As a caregiver, you need to take care of yourself, be honest about what you can do, and take steps to prepare yourself.

The person who receives the care is a "care recipient." The care recipient may need care for either a short time or for many years. The caregiver needs to discuss the illness and diagnosis with the care recipient's health care provider so he or she will understand what the future may hold.

Taking care of yourself as a caregiver means keeping up with your interests and hobbies, caring for your own health, and finding a support system. Also, finding ways to deal with negative feelings about caregiving by talking with friends, a health care provider, or a support group is very important.

Be honest in realizing your limits as a caregiver. Caregiving for a long time without any help may be more than you can handle. Consider the costs and benefits of getting help at home. Friends, family members, or community organizations may be able to provide a break for you.

It is always important to be prepared for what is ahead. Classes, books, newsletters, and websites are available to help train you to be a skilled caregiver. Community organizations can also provide support for caregivers.



Being a caregiver can be rewarding but challenging. Write down questions and concerns to ask your VA provider. A social worker can also offer community resources available to you. Don't hesitate to ask for help. ■

## Recipe for Health

### Chicken Orientale

*With no added salt and very little oil in the marinade, these broiled or grilled kabobs made with skinless chicken breasts are low in saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium.*

#### For the kabob:

- 8 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into chunks
- Black pepper to taste
- 8 fresh mushrooms
- 8 parboiled whole white onions
- 2 oranges, quartered
- 8 canned pineapple, chunks
- 8 cherry tomatoes

#### For the marinade:

- 1 can (6 oz) frozen apple juice concentrate, thawed
- 1 C dry white wine
- 2 Tbsp soy sauce, low sodium
- Dash of ground ginger
- 2 Tbsp vinegar
- 1/4 C vegetable oil

1. Sprinkle chicken breasts with pepper.
2. Thread 8 skewers as follows: chicken, mushroom, chicken, onion, chicken, orange quarter, chicken, pineapple chunk, cherry tomato.
3. Place kabobs in shallow pan.
4. Combine remaining ingredients; spoon over kabobs. Marinate in refrigerator at least 1 hour.
5. Drain. Broil 6 inches from heat, 15 minutes on each side, brushing with marinade every 5 minutes. Discard any leftover marinade.

*Yield:* 8 servings *Serving Size:* 1 chicken breast kabob  
*Each serving provides:* 359 calories, 11 g total fat, 2 g saturated fat, 66 mg cholesterol, 226 mg sodium

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

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Exercise and Your Heart .....	2
Medication Safety Tips .....	2
Emergency Preparedness Tips .....	3
Nutrition Quiz .....	3
Why Your Medication Has More than One Name .....	3

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

# Exercise & Your Heart

Sheri Fihn, RN  
Cynthia Dutra-Brice, RN



For many years, scientists and researchers have studied the relationship between exercise and the heart. Findings show that people who are active or fit have less heart disease than those who are more inactive. In addition, when active people do develop heart disease, it tends to occur at a later age and seems to be less severe. Further research studies have shown that physical activity is also helpful in preventing or lessening the effects of other chronic diseases, including diabetes, hypertension, osteoporosis, and colon cancer.

According to the American Heart Association, an inactive lifestyle is one of the five major risk factors for heart disease (along with high blood pressure, abnormal blood cholesterol, smoking, and obesity). Regular exercise has a positive effect on many of the risk factors for heart disease. In fact, the benefits of a regular exercise program along with other positive lifestyle changes (such as eating healthy, stopping smoking, and taking your medications) can be dramatic.

## Benefits of Exercise

- Increase in ability to exercise
- Reduction in body weight
- Reduction in blood pressure
- Reduction in “bad” (LDL and total) cholesterol
- Increase in “good” (HDL) cholesterol
- Increase in insulin sensitivity



## Medication Safety Tips

*Don't be afraid to speak up!*

Ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse *before* taking a medication if:

- The medication looks different
- The medication smells different or is very unpleasant
- The directions on the prescription are different from what your provider told you
- The name of medication on the prescription bottle is different than what you expected
- The reason for taking the medication is different than the condition you are treating (either on the prescription bottle, medication information sheet, or counseling provided by your pharmacist)

*If you have any concerns with your medications, call:*

*pharmacy at 1-800-311-2511 or  
advice nurse at 1-800-455-0057*



## Risk Factors for Heart Disease

- Immediate family member with heart disease before age 55
- Cigarette smoking
- High blood pressure
- Abnormal cholesterol levels
- Diabetes
- Inactive lifestyle
- Obesity



## How much exercise is enough?

It has been estimated that there would be a 30-40% reduction in serious heart disease if most Americans were to simply meet recommendations to have at least 30 minutes of “moderate” activity on most, and preferably all, days of the week. Some examples of moderate activity are brisk walking (3-4 miles per hour), yard work, household tasks, bicycling, or swimming.

## What are the risks of exercise?

When exercising, there is a brief increase in the risk of having a heart-related complication, such as a heart attack or serious heart rhythm problem. However, this risk is extremely small—even lower among regular exercisers. In addition, contrary to popular view, most heart attacks occur during rest, not during physical activity.

Therefore, exercise is both healthy and safe. However, it is still important to be aware of warning signs and symptoms such as:

- chest discomfort (pain or pressure in the chest, jaw or neck, possibly radiating into the shoulder, arm, or back)
- unusual shortness of breath
- dizziness or light-headedness
- heart rhythm abnormalities (sensations of heart beat skipping, palpitations, or thumping).

Seek medical attention immediately if you experience any of these symptoms.

## How do I start?

How can you become more physically active? First, if you currently have heart disease, or are over 45 years of age and have two or more risk factors, you should consult your physician before starting. Clearly most people can benefit from a half hour of moderate activity in their daily activities. Again, these activities can take many different forms. If you know you simply can not set aside this time to exercise, then try to perform more activities in your daily routine by walking up the stairs rather than taking the elevator, walking rather than driving a short distance to the store, or trying several shorter periods of activity. The most important thing is to get started! ■

# Emergency Preparedness for Persons with Special Needs



- Contact your local emergency information management office. Many local emergency management offices maintain registers of people with disabilities so they can be located and assisted quickly in a disaster.
- Consider getting a medical alert system.
- Team up with a family member, friend, neighbor, or other available person who can assist you, and be sure they are familiar with your special needs.
- Determine the locations of wheelchair accessible emergency shelters, if necessary.
- Find out the locations of emergency shelters that do or do not accept service animals.
- Prepare a kit (in addition to emergency kit) that includes a 14-day supply of all medications. Include medical information (e.g., detailed information about the specifications of your medication regimen, a list of the style and serial numbers of medical devices such as pacemakers, names and locations of doctors, diagnosis if relevant, special food requirements or allergies, etc).
- Have oxygen, catheters, and other medical or special equipment on hand.
- Store back-up equipment, such as a manual wheelchair, at a neighbor's home, school, or workplace.
- Prepare for the requirements of your working service animal, and be aware they may become disoriented in an emergency.
- Have a flashlight, shoes, wheelchair, or cane within reach of your bed. Have prepared whatever you need (including mobility devices) to get out of bed and move around.
- Have a whistle attached to a flashlight, and one also in your emergency kit. This will help attract attention to your location.



- If you require respirators or other electricity-dependent medical equipment, make prior medical arrangements with your physician. Also, register in advance with your local power company.
- If you require oxygen, check with your supplier about emergency plans.
- If you have a severe speech, language, or hearing disability:
  - ✓ Store a writing pad and pencils to communicate with others.
  - ✓ Remind people that you cannot hear and ask them to be your source of emergency information as it comes over their radio or TV. ■



*Information provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs*

## Why Your Medication Has More Than One Name...

*Jill O'Brien, MS, RPh  
Svetlana Sapukhina, PharmD*

### **What is the generic or brand name?**

All medications have one generic name. In addition, they may have one or more brand names, which are usually shorter and easier to remember. When a drug company develops a new medication, it is given a brand name. Usually a company holds exclusive patent rights to make a medication for up to 20 years. When the patent for a brand name medication expires, other companies can start making generic versions of that medication.

### **Examples of brand and generic names:**

- **Ibuprofen** is the generic name for **Motrin** or **Advil** used to treat pain.
- **Acetaminophen** is a generic medication of the brand name medication **Tylenol**.



### **Are generic medications as good as their brand-name counterparts?**

A generic is a copy of an already existing medication. It may have a different color or shape than its brand name counterpart, but by federal law, it must have the same active ingredients, effectiveness, and safety as the brand name medication.

Generics often cost considerably less. This is possible not because of lower quality, but because research and advertising costs are much less for generics. For these reasons, the VA readily supports generic substitution of medications. ■

## March is National Nutrition Month!

*Test your knowledge on eating healthy and staying fit!*

- T F** 1. The best way to lose weight is to reduce the amount of fat in your diet.
- T F** 2. In order to eat healthy, you must avoid dining out.
- T F** 3. You should shop for groceries based on whether a product is labeled "fat free" or "reduced fat."
- T F** 4. Blood pressure can be reduced by watching what you eat.

*(answers on page 4)*

## 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  
(650) 493-5000

### VA MENLO PARK DIVISION

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

### VA CAPITOLA OPC

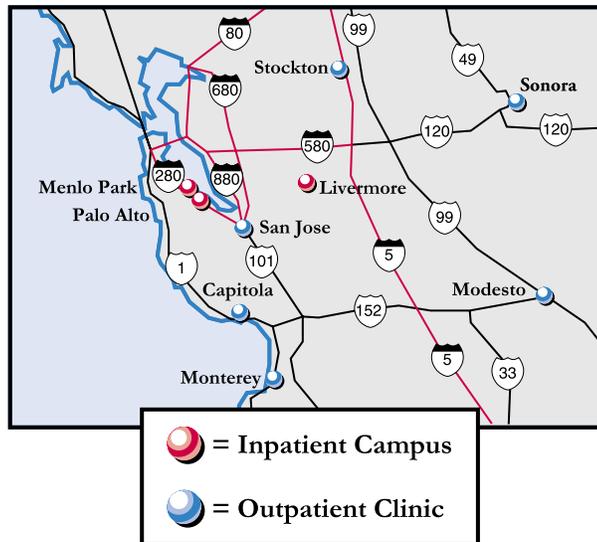
1350 N. 41st Street,  
Suite 102  
Capitola, CA 95010  
(831) 464-5519

### VA MODESTO OPC

1524 McHenry Avenue,  
Suite 315  
Modesto, CA 95350  
(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) 363-3011

### VA SONORA OPC

19747 Greenley Road  
Sonora, CA 95370  
(209) 588-2600

### VA STOCKTON OPC

500 W. Hospital Road  
Stockton, CA 95231  
(209) 946-3400

World Wide Web Address:  
[www.palo-alto.med.va.gov](http://www.palo-alto.med.va.gov)



## Answers to Nutrition Quiz (from page 3)

**1.False.** To lose weight, you want to reduce your *total caloric intake*. You can do this by reducing *both dietary fat and carbohydrates*. The combination of a reduced calorie diet and *increased physical activity* is also recommended since it can help reduce your waistline and improve the fitness of your heart and lungs.

**2.False.** You *can* eat healthy when dining out by following a few tips. Special requests you can make are to serve dressing on the side, use less cooking oil, and leave butter, gravy, and sauces off. If you know you are going to dine out, eat lighter and be more active a few days before and after. Order a large salad or an appetizer as an entrée. Order entrées that are broiled, roasted or baked, avoiding fried foods and dishes with thick, rich sauces or gravies. You can also choose to eat only half your meal in the restaurant and take the rest home to eat for another meal.

**3.False.** Just because a product is *fat free*, does not mean it is *calorie free*. In fact, fat free or reduced fat products can have as many, if not more, calories per serving than regular products. You do need to watch your fat intake but remember that calories count too.

**4.True.** A diet rich in lower calorie foods such as fruits and vegetables has been shown to help reduce blood pressure. By eating more fruits and vegetables, you can naturally avoid eating foods with higher sodium content. Also avoid canned vegetables with added salt. Use fresh poultry, fish, and lean meat rather than canned, processed, or smoked foods. Flavor foods with herbs, spices, lemon, lime, vinegar, and salt-free seasoning rather than with salt. ■

*Adapted from information provided by National Institutes of Health*

### Questions or Comments?

If you have any questions or topics you would like addressed in "To Your Health" feel free to send in your request via postal mail or e-mail to:

Sora Youn, Pharmacy Practice Resident  
VA Palo Alto Health Care System  
3801 Miranda Avenue #119 (Pharmacy)  
Palo Alto, CA 94304

E-mail: [sora.youn@med.va.gov](mailto:sora.youn@med.va.gov)

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

### Editorial Board:

Noelle Hasson, PharmD  
Rosemary Gill, RN, MS  
Sora Youn, PharmD  
Kris Morrow