

to your

# Health!

*"Promoting Good Health Through Information"*

Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System • Patient Education Newsletter • Summer 2004

## What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

*Laura J. Peters, Ph.D.*

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, is a reaction that people can have to a very stressful or traumatic situation. PTSD is considered to be a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. When people are faced with a life-threatening event or witness an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to another person, they may respond with intense fear, helplessness, and horror.

Other experiences that can trigger PTSD:

- Combat
- Sexual assault
- Physical attack
- Robbery or mugging
- Being taken hostage
- Terrorist attack
- Torture
- Being a prisoner of war or in a concentration camp
- Natural or manmade disasters
- Severe accidents
- Being diagnosed with a life threatening illness

When people go through such traumatic events, they may end up with disturbing memories, which are hard to get

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## Recipe for Health SUNSHINE RICE

*This citrusy rice contains almonds, celery, and onions, but no added salt for a flavorful low sodium side dish.*

### Ingredients:

1 1/2 Tbsp vegetable oil	1/2 C orange juice
1 1/4 C finely chopped celery with leaves	2 Tbsp lemon juice
1 1/2 C finely chopped onion	dash hot sauce
1 C water	1 C long-grain white rice, uncooked
	1/4 C slivered almonds

1. Heat oil in medium saucepan. Add celery and onions and sauté until tender, about 10 minutes.
2. Add water, juices, and hot sauce. Bring to a boil. Stir in rice and bring back to a boil. Let stand covered until rice is tender and liquid is absorbed.
3. Stir in almonds. Serve immediately as a side dish for a fish entree.

**Yield: 4 servings**

**Each serving provides:**

Calories:	182
Total fat:	7 g
Saturated Fat:	less than 1 g
Cholesterol:	0 mg
Sodium:	21 mg

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

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

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# “Exorcise” Your Back Pain with Exercise (Part 2): Strengthen Your Back

*Ernest Winkenwerder, MPT*

Few people injure their back in one single event lifting something that is too heavy. Usually injury to the muscles, ligaments and discs occurs over time through repeated strain caused by poor posture, faulty body mechanics (eg. lifting heavy loads while twisting and bending at the back), loss of flexibility, a general decline in physical fitness and stressful work and living habits. Simple exercises have been found to help some of the stiffness and pain from this problem, which will affect eight out of ten people at some time in their lives. Follow these exercises to strengthen your back to protect it during work, sports and other daily activities.

## **Exercise 1: Partial sit-ups - a great exercise to correct the excessive sway in the low back. Obesity and weak stomach muscles tend to leave the back in an uncomfortably increased arch position.**

1. Lie with knees bent on a comfortably firm surface like on a bed or floor with pads or blanket cushioning.
2. Lift the shoulder blades fully and smoothly off of the bed to work the abdominals well. Don't go too far. Full sit-ups are generally not recommended. If you hook your feet under a table or have someone hold them in a full sit-up, you are actually using your tight hip flexors, not your stomach muscles.

3. To get the side abdominal muscles (the obliques), bend slightly to the right and left as you lift your shoulder blades (you might aim your elbows toward the opposite knee).
4. Hold for a count of 3 and repeat 5 to 10 times. Gradually work up to 20 to 30 repetitions.

Many people injure themselves at the end of the day when the back muscles are tired and can't support the weight of the spine as well. To strengthen these endurance muscles try the prone leg raise. This exercise may remind some of swimming which is often recommended for back pain, not only because the weight of gravity is decreased in water, but also because the swim stroke works the same back muscles we need in walking outside the water.

## **Exercise 2: Prone leg raise - helps work back muscles.**

1. Lie on your stomach with a pillow or two under your hips to maintain a neutral spine.
2. Now lift one leg up several inches off the floor without twisting your back. Feel the back muscles working?
3. Hold for a count of 3 and repeat 5 to 10 times. Repeat with the other leg. Gradually work up to 20 to 30 repetitions.

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## **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**

out of their minds. They also might experience nightmares or distress when they are exposed to something that reminds them of the event. Some people try to avoid situations that remind them of the trauma and may become very isolated. Sometimes people have trouble concentrating, are on edge, and are jumpy when something unexpected happens.

These reactions often make it difficult for people with PTSD to work and maintain relationships. The VA has been a leader in treating PTSD, especially combat-related PTSD and PTSD related to sexual assault. VA Palo Alto Health Care System houses the National Center for PTSD, which treats combat-related PTSD in an inpatient setting and also has a special program for women veterans. Outpatient

therapy for PTSD is also available through the Mental Health Clinics. There is hope for people with PTSD to heal and the VA has many experienced staff willing to help. For more information on PTSD or treatment services call:

- Menlo Park Division: (650) 617-2772
- Livermore Division : (925) 373-4700 ext 35390
- San Jose Outpatient Clinic: (408) 363-3050
- Monterey Outpatient Clinic: (831) 883-3817
- Stockton Outpatient Clinic: (925) 373-4700 ext 35390
- Modesto Outpatient Clinic: (925) 373-4700 ext 35390

# Quiz on Drinking Alcohol

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

## True or False:

1. People with high blood pressure don't have to limit the amount of alcoholic beverages they drink.
2. Alcoholic drinks contain calories, which is another good reason to cut back on them if you're trying to lose weight and control high blood pressure.
3. A 12-ounce can of beer counts as one drink – the same as 5 ounces of wine or 1 ounce of whiskey.

## Answers:

1. **False.** Alcoholic beverages can raise blood pressure. People with high blood pressure need to limit themselves to a moderate amount of alcoholic beverages. This means no more than one drink a day for women, and two drinks a day for men. One drink is about 12 ounces of beer (regular or light), 5 ounces of wine, or 1 ounce of whiskey.
2. **True.** Even 5 ounces of wine can have 100 calories. The calories in alcoholic drinks are 'empty' calories - they don't contain any nutrients.
3. **True.** They all count as one drink. The beer actually has about 150 calories. The whiskey and wine each have about 100 calories.

# Finding (Good) Internet Health Information

*Ken Tipton*

Everyone is searching the Internet for information, but like your home mail delivery, a lot of it is "junk". Some estimate that 95% of health material on the web is inaccurate and potentially dangerous. But there is good, reliable information out there - you just need to follow some logical guidelines to find it. A good place to start looking is on any Internet search engine, such as Google ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)). Simply type in some key terms that you want information on, see what pops up, and this will link you to some websites to browse.

## Look elsewhere if:

- There are many ads - some good web sites have ads, but the information should not be second to the sales pitch. Also watch out for sites with a lot of "pop-up" ads.
- Articles end with a purchase link - if the main reason for the information is to sell a product, you cannot be assured of unbiased information.
- Brand names are prominent - if the article repeatedly mentions a brand, you have an "infomercial".

## Look for:

- Government sponsored information - Most agencies make large amounts of current unbiased research available. [www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov) organizes much of this and provides a mirror site in Spanish.

- Professional associations - Many provide current information on their specialty to the public. (Example: American Cancer Society - [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org))
- Support organizations for diseases - Support groups have grown up around a large number of diseases. These web sites offer information and interaction for those dealing with a particular condition.
- Health on the Net Foundation - this European organization evaluates health web sites and has a search feature for them: [www.hon.ch](http://www.hon.ch)

The Medical Library at PAD (Bldg 101, Room A2-200) offers a Consumer Health Information Web Sites handout for reliable sites, and the library staff is available to help. The library is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. ■

## New Education Kiosks

Look for brand new education kiosks in clinic waiting rooms in Stockton, Modesto, Sonoma, San Jose, Palo Alto and Menlo Park.

Learn more about your health and print out information to take home. Also, you will soon be able to request medication refills from the kiosk!

## 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) 477-2560

### VA MENLO PARK DIVISION

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

### VA CAPITOLA OPC

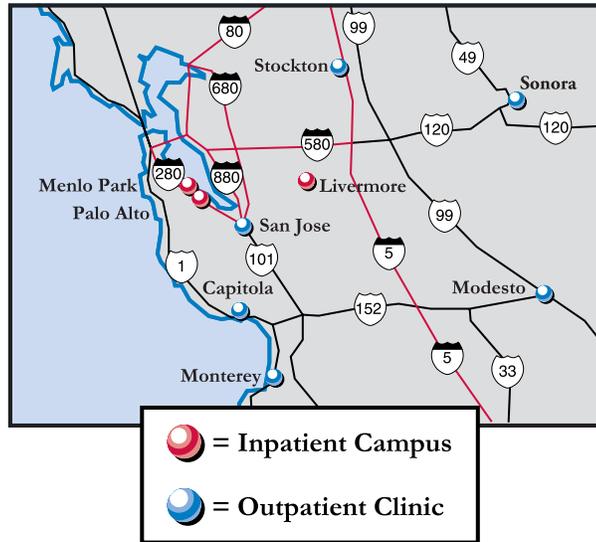
1350 N. 41st Street,  
Suite 102  
Capitola, CA 95010  
(831) 464-5519

### 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)



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## “Exorcise” Your Back Pain with Exercise

Swimming, a good walking program, or biking can be very helpful for some people in building endurance to decrease the likelihood of injury. These exercises also burn calories to decrease obesity, which is another strain on the low back.



Check with your healthcare provider if you need further direction in “exorcising back pain.” Many other exercises exist to help in controlling and decreasing low back pain. Most are some variation on improving flexibility and strength to protect the complex structure of muscles, ligaments, discs and bones that make up the strong and flexible lumbar spine. Perhaps they will help you.

### Questions or Comments?

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

*Julie M. Lee, PharmD*  
Pharmacy Practice Resident  
VA Palo Alto Health Care System  
3801 Miranda Avenue #119 (Pharmacy)  
Palo Alto, CA 94304  
(650) 493-5000 ext. 63678

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### Editorial Board:

Noelle Hasson, PharmD  
Rosemary Gill, RN, MS  
Julie M. Lee, PharmD  
Kris Morrow



## Tips for Healthy Living

- Instead of taking the elevator, try using the stairs more often.
- Try snacking on carrot or celery sticks as a healthier alternative to replace potato chips, cookies, or candy.