



Veterans'

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

Health

W I N T E R • 2 0 0 0

Reining In
Your Risk Of
Heart Disease

In Terror's
Aftermath
Recognizing and
coping with PTSD

Fresh Starts
Are you ready to say
goodbye to nicotine?

VA Healthcare
System of Ohio



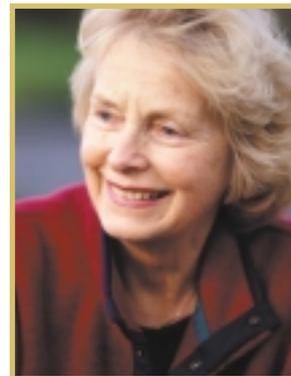
Fresh Starts

By the time you receive this issue, we will have greeted the new millennium. I hope the transition continues to proceed smoothly for you. The new year often brings with it a number of resolutions for the months ahead. Our new year in the VA Healthcare System of Ohio actually began on October 1, 1999. Our goals for the coming year include continuing to improve our services to you by focusing on increasing the number of locations where you can obtain healthcare services and improving the timeliness of services and appointments. Please refer to our listing of locations for healthcare services on the back cover of this issue. We will continue to update it as we add new locations.



Many of us make personal New Year's resolutions that focus on changing our current lifestyles to improve our overall health. In this issue, you will find information related to smoking cessation. Much national attention has been given to the healthcare risks associated with smoking. Each of our medical centers offers smoking cessation services that may help you in fulfilling this resolution during the coming year. Please remember that it's never too late to stop smoking.

On pages 3 through 5, you will find information related to the number one killer in the U.S.—heart disease. You'll learn about the major risk factors and what you can do to curtail your personal risk. We'll also shed light on testing and treatment procedures commonly performed when cardiac symptoms or a heart attack occurs.



Another disease that affects veterans is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Participating in combat is one of the most common causes of PTSD. Learn more about the symptoms and current treatment of PTSD on page 6 of this issue.

In closing, as we usher in a new millennium, think about starting fresh. Examine your current lifestyle and consider making the changes that will improve your health and your outlook.

Sincerely,

—Laura Miller
Network Director

Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 22 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through the VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of the VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

ON THE COVER: Robert and Daisy Kinzie

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Reining In Your Risk Of Heart Disease

You have the power to protect yourself

Your age and your family medical history—when it comes to protecting yourself against heart disease, those are just about the only two risk factors you can't control. Not surprisingly, they're called nonmodifiable risk factors. The good news is that other important risk factors—the so-called modifiable ones—are well within your control. Here's a look at each one and what you can do to rein in your risk.

Smoking

Adam Greene, M.D., Acting Chief of Cardiology at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center, says smoking is the number one risk factor people can do something about. Cigarettes cause many thousands of deaths a year from heart disease alone (not to mention deaths from cancer and other causes). If you smoke, you're opening yourself up to huge danger. If you're ready to quit, the VA can help. See page 7 for more information.

High cholesterol

High cholesterol contributes to the formation of a fatty substance called plaque. Plaque sticks to artery walls, where it clogs blood vessels and impairs blood flow. This condition, called atherosclerosis, can lead to heart attack and stroke.

Although a family tendency toward high cholesterol can push your levels into the unhealthy range (above 200 mg/dL for total cholesterol levels), what you eat and how much exercise you get can also affect your levels. One

simple way to help improve blood cholesterol is by cutting back on the saturated fat in your diet. "Instead of solid fats like butter, margarine and lard, use more liquid fats like canola and olive oils," says Dr. Greene. Your VA primary care provider can tell you whether your current cholesterol levels put you at risk and what you can do to control them. He or she may prescribe medication to help lower your levels.

High blood pressure

Medication and lifestyle changes can also help control high blood pressure, another important risk factor. "Studies show that keeping pressure at ideal levels—around 125/85 mm Hg—reduces a person's risk of stroke and heart attack," says Dr. Greene. "Keep the salt shaker off the table." If you eat a lot of canned, processed or other prepared foods, it may be helpful to check nutrition labels for sodium information. And if your doctor has prescribed medication, take it exactly as instructed.

continued on next page



Thanks to care he received at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center, Robert Kinzie has bounced back from a heart attack and bypass surgery. Today he enjoys life with Daisy, his wife of 36 years.

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Obesity

If you are overweight, reaching and maintaining a healthy weight can help keep many risk factors in check, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes. But the good news is that losing just a few extra pounds can help keep your risk in line. So don't give up if you have a lot to lose. To keep your heart healthy, Dr. Greene advises eating fewer prepared foods and more fresh fruits, vegetables, fish and whole grains. "These foods are also rich in antioxidant vitamins, which can help reduce your risk of heart attack," he says. He also reminds people

who are trying to lose weight or make other lifestyle changes that "it's not all or nothing. There's always a day when you may not feel like eating right or exercising," he says. "That doesn't make you a failure. But it does mean that the next day you should go back to your healthy routine."

Inactive lifestyle

If you now lead an inactive lifestyle, be aware that the odds of your having a heart attack are higher than normal. Fortunately, says Dr. Greene, you don't have to run 10 miles a day to help your heart. "Small amounts of exercise can bring great

rewards," he says.

"Even something like 20 minutes of brisk walking three times a week can help lower high cholesterol and high blood pressure as well as control blood sugar levels and weight."

Diabetes

Dr. Greene points out that people with diabetes are well advised to take all the steps mentioned above in addition to taking insulin as prescribed. Uncontrolled diabetes damages blood vessels, making male diabetics twice as likely and female diabetics five times as likely to develop atherosclerosis. Diabetes in combination with any of the risk factors described above raises the risk of heart disease even more.

In addition, he reminds postmenopausal

Tests Of The Heart



Anyone who experiences angina (chest pain) or shortness of breath upon exertion should be checked by their doctor, says Dr. Greene. One of the tests the doctor may use is an exercise thallium study. In this procedure, a radioactive dye is injected into the bloodstream. A camera takes pictures of the heart while the patient is exercising on a treadmill. The radioactive material allows the parts of the heart to be viewed on a screen, allowing doctors to pinpoint blocked arteries.

Some patients may require a cardiac catheterization. In this procedure, usually done on an outpatient basis, the patient lies down on a special X-ray table. The doctor injects a local anesthetic into the top of the right thigh and a sheath (a short catheter) is inserted into an artery near the groin. A

longer catheter is threaded through the sheath toward the heart. An X-ray dye is injected through the catheter, allowing the heart to be viewed on a video screen. During the catheterization, doctors can measure pressures inside a patient's heart, find out how well the heart's pumping chambers are working, check for blockages and look for other signs of heart disease.

When a catheterization shows blockages, angioplasty may be necessary. In angioplasty, a balloon-tipped catheter is threaded through the sheath toward the blockage. When it reaches the site, the balloon is inflated and deflated several times to clear the artery of plaque. Sometimes a stent, a metal scaffold-like device, is threaded to the site and inserted into the artery to help keep it open wide. In cases of severe blockages, bypass surgery may be required.

No Keeping Him Down

Daisy Kinzie knew that Robert, her husband of 36 years, was stubborn, but she never thought he would go about his once-a-week job—hauling and delivering 140 bundles of newspapers—despite nagging chest pains.

“At first I didn’t tell Daisy about the pain,” says Robert. “It was a dull pain. It didn’t seem like what I had heard a heart attack would be like.”

But by the time he got home, Robert knew something was wrong. “He told me he was having a heart attack,” says Daisy, “so I drove him to the hospital. He was going to drive himself!”

Although Robert was a borderline diabetic, the 75-year-old World War II veteran never smoked, never drank and had been watching his diet. All in all, he considered himself pretty healthy—which may explain why he failed to see his doctor for regular checkups. As a result, he had no idea his heart health might be in jeopardy.

He was admitted to the Cincinnati VA Medical Center, where he met Dr. Greene and had a cardiac catheterization to pinpoint the blockages.

Throughout the testing and in spite of ongoing chest pains, Robert felt confident that he was in the best hands. “I knew everything was going to be all right,” he says. “There was no question in my mind.”

Based on the findings of the catheterization, Dr. Greene recommended that Robert undergo quadruple bypass surgery two days later at the adjoining University of Cincinnati Hospital, which is affiliated with the Cincinnati VAMC. The procedure went flawlessly and within two weeks of feeling the initial chest pains, Robert was home, his



After undergoing quadruple bypass surgery, Robert Kinzie's heart is on the mend. Follow-up visits with Adam Greene, M.D., at the Cincinnati VAMC ensure he stays on a healthy track.

heart on the mend.

The Kinzies live in a big house with lots of stairs, so Robert has been staying active indoors for now. The couple is also continuing to eat carefully. “A typical meal is a small portion of lean meat, green beans or peas and corn,” says Daisy. “And when I cook vegetables, I use just a dusting of vegetable oil in a Teflon skillet.” Being a diabetic, Robert has long relied on sugar-free desserts to satisfy a sweet tooth.

Looking back on the care he received at the VA, Robert says, “Nobody could get any better treatment than I did. And I’m sure I wasn’t a special person.”

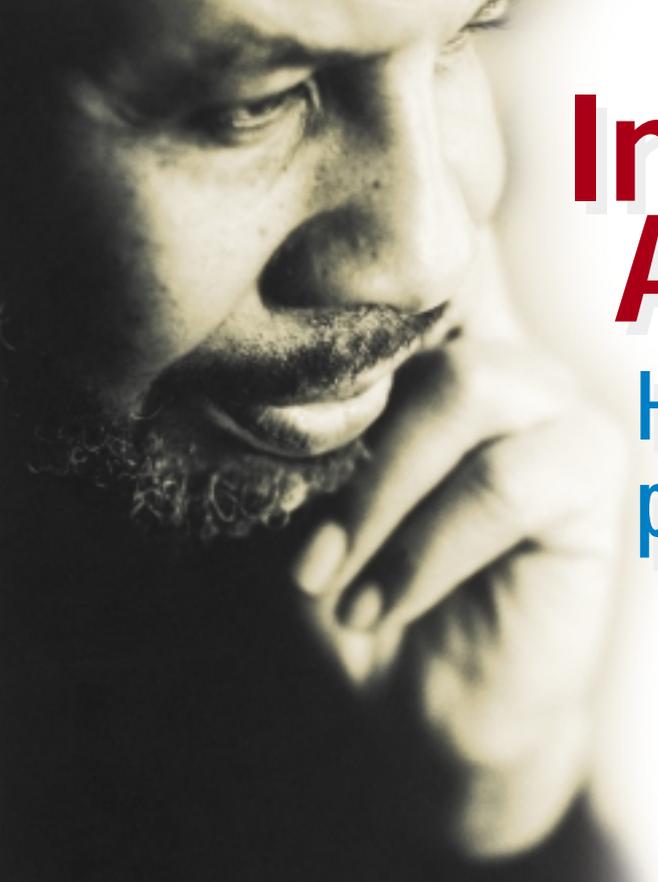
Of course, that’s where Robert is mistaken. The VA prides itself on giving every veteran the special care and attention he or she has earned.

women to talk to their VA healthcare providers about hormone replacement therapy. After menopause, women lose the heart-protective effects of estrogen and may require replacement hormones to lower their risk for heart disease.

To help stay on a healthy track, Dr. Greene says home monitoring can help. People with diabetes need to measure their blood sugar levels and those with high blood pressure can use a home blood pressure meter. Those trying to

shed excess pounds, stop smoking or become more active may find it useful to keep a journal that tracks their progress.

If you have any questions about your personal risk for heart disease and ways you can reduce it, talk to your VA healthcare provider. Do your part by getting regular screenings for high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes and taking any medication exactly as prescribed. **VH**



In Terror's Aftermath

Help for post-traumatic stress disorder

I magine being completely terrorized. Imagine fearing you're about to lose your life ... or worse. Now imagine surviving such a situation. For many who do, including people who have seen combat, rape victims and rescue workers, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) forces them to live out their days in fear that it will happen again.

A state of alert

"You avoid any reminders of the event and don't go near areas where it might have happened," says Arthur Aaronson, Psy.D., acting coordinator of the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Residential Rehabilitation Program (PRRP) at the Dayton VA Medical Center. "If PTSD was triggered by combat in the jungles of Vietnam, for example, a veteran might stay away from forest areas or get upset when he hears a helicopter overhead."

People with PTSD tend to relive the event in their minds—often, it is in a dream. A ringing telephone can startle them, and a minor upset can trigger rage. The reason, says Aaronson, is that the

body is preparing sufferers for the possibility of a repeat episode.

They are constantly on guard, constantly seeking to be in control in case the situation should happen again.

Getting on with life

The PRRP helps people with PTSD move on with their lives. Before entering the residential program, a patient must be substance free for at least 30 days to benefit fully. The program requires a 45- to 90-day stay during which fellow patients, called cohorts, form a bond that supports them through rehabilitation. Explains Aaronson, "In contrast to World War II soldiers who remained with the same unit throughout their tour of duty, Vietnam soldiers were rotated into a company and then taken out as individuals. Because they didn't travel as a unit, they lacked the support and friendship that might have seen them through tough times." The program includes frequent rap sessions, during which cohorts discuss how they deal with trauma and learn how to manage anger and stress.

Reliving the trauma

But the pivotal part of the program involves helping veterans relive their traumas. With the support and guidance of a therapist, the veterans learn they can survive the experience just as they did in the past. But this time, they can fall back on newly acquired coping skills—the same skills that will help them ease back into a more normal life once they leave the program. **VH**

Each Monday, around 1 p.m., at the Dayton VA Medical Center, about 10 people get ready to make a dras-

tic change in their lives—or at least give it their best shot. The big event? Getting screened for a program that will help them beat the top preventable cause of death—

smoking. “It takes an average of five or six serious attempts for most people to quit smoking,” says Fred Peterson, Psy.D., Coordinator of Smoking Cessation Services at the medical center. “Therefore, we have a philosophy: To be tobacco free, it takes as long as it takes.

People don’t have to beat themselves up because they didn’t make it the first time. Instead, they can focus on what they have learned and increase their chance of long-term success.”

What’s it like to participate in a stop-smoking program held at VA facilities throughout VISN 10? Here’s an inside look at the three steps.

1 **The assessment clinic**, during which smokers learn about the class and share information about their medical and smoking history. In addition, staff measure carbon monoxide levels in the smokers’ exhalation and record blood pressure.

At the end of the assessment, prospective ex-smokers are given three assignments to complete

before classes begin: They must fill out a questionnaire, keep a written record of their smoking behavior and start cutting back on the number of cigarettes they smoke.

2 **The quit smoking class** consists of five classes. In the first, veterans learn about the nicotine replacement patch that will help them conquer their addiction. They examine feelings of boredom and frustration that may prompt them to light up. Finally, veterans are asked to pick a quit date and sign a contract.

Over the next four classes, students learn to identify their smoking triggers and develop ways to defuse them. One exercise asks students to predict when lapses might occur and outline a plan for preventing them. Smokers learn breathing exercises to help kill cravings and calm nerves.

3 **The follow-up clinic**, which involves three

follow-up visits after the program. In general, Dayton’s program has been successful, beating the national average for quit rates by 7 percent.

What about you? Are you ready to meet the smoke-free challenge? If so, call your nearest VA healthcare facility to find out about a smoking-cessation program in your area. **VH**

‘It Takes As Long As It Takes’

An inside look at going tobacco free



Fred Peterson, Psy.D., Coordinator of Smoking Cessation Services at the Dayton VA Medical Center, counsels a veteran on quitting smoking.

Contact the smoking cessation coordinator at the VA medical center nearest you.

Chillicothe VA Campus Roger Grossnickle 740-773-1141	Dayton VA Campus Fred Peterson, Jr., Psy.D. 937-268-6511	Wade Park VA Campus Lori Stevic-Rust, Ph.D. 216-791-3800
Columbus VA Campus Roberta DiLorenzo, R.N. 614-257-5441	Painesville VA Campus Kenneth Weiss, Ph.D. 440-546-2778	

Reaching Us Is Easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

Akron VA Campus

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Akron, OH 44311
330-344-4177

Athens VA Campus

510 West Union Street
Athens, OH 45701
740-593-7314

Bellevue VA Campus

103 Landmark
Bellevue, KY 41073
606-392-3840

Brecksville VA Campus

10000 Brecksville Road
Brecksville, OH 44141
440-526-3030

Canton VA Campus

221 3rd Street SE
Canton, OH 44702
330-489-4600

Chillicothe VA Campus

17273 State Route 104
Chillicothe, OH 45601
740-773-1141

Cincinnati VA Campus

3200 Vine Street
Cincinnati, OH 45220
513-861-3100

Columbus VA Campus

543 Taylor Avenue
Columbus, OH 43203
614-257-5200

Dayton VA Campus

4100 West Third Street
Dayton, OH 45428
937-268-6511

Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075
606-572-6202

Lorain VA Campus

205 West 20th Street
Lorain, OH 44052
440-244-3833

Mansfield VA Campus

1456 Park Avenue West
Suite N
Mansfield, OH 44906
419-529-4602

McCafferty VA Campus

4242 Lorain Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44113
216-939-0699

Middletown VA Campus

675 North University Blvd.
Middletown, OH 45042
513-423-8387

Call Tele-Nurse



There's someone on the line 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to serve you. If you have symptoms, questions or need advice about any health problem, call us toll free at **1-888-VET-OHIO (1-888-838-6446)**.

Otis Moss/University Hospital VA Campus

8819 Quincy Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-721-7221

Painesville VA Campus

54 South State Street
Suite 204
Painesville, OH 44077
440-357-6740

Portsmouth VA Campus

621 Broadway Street
Portsmouth, OH 45662
740-353-3236

Sandusky VA Campus

3416 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, OH 44870
419-625-7350

Springfield VA Campus

512 South Burnett Road
Springfield, OH 45505
937-328-3385

Wade Park VA Campus

10701 East Boulevard
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-791-3800

Youngstown VA Campus

2031 Belmont Avenue
Youngstown, OH 44505
330-740-9200

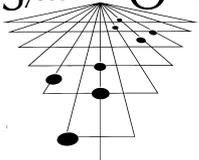
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