



Employee Health Promotion
Disease Prevention

VA Employee Wellness Program

Wellness is Now

For further information, please contact the Employee Health Promotion/Disease Prevention Office at:
AskVHAemployeeWellness@va.gov

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Healthy Life[®] Letter

Promoting Health. Enhancing Life. Reducing Costs.

December 2011

Headline News from Your EHPDP Program Office:

Monthly Employee Health Promotion Calls: EHPDP calls occur every third Tuesday of each month at 2 PM EASTERN 1-800-767-1750. Access code 13694#

Upcoming schedule:

- December Results of the HAIG survey – what it means for you
- January 2012 EHPDP Grants 2012
- February 2012 Are vitamins really necessary?

Planning a Health Fair for Employees?

Let us know at:
AskVHAEmployeeWellness@va.gov

Congratulations:



To the Minneapolis VA who hosted a Zumbathon for Breast Cancer Awareness. Participants collected money, burned off calories and had a blast! Great work Doris Stuber (Zumba instructor) and Cindy Tomczak (VHA Wellness Coach) for organizing this event.



And to the Des Moines VA on the grand opening of their new Disc Golf Course. Employees and Veterans are able to take advantage of this fun exercise!

Dashing through the snow = 330 calories

The Cooper Institute has compiled a list of favorite holiday activities and how many calories each of them burns in 30 minutes.

- Dashing through the snow (on foot, not in a sleigh!) = 330 calories
- Jumping for joy = 330 calories
- Sawing down the Christmas tree = 270 calories
- Sledding = 270 calories
- Chopping wood = 240 calories
- Shoveling snow = 240 calories
- Shopping on December 24th = 150 calories
- Caroling = 90 calories
- Shopping = 90 calories
- Trimming the tree = 60 calories
- Wrapping gifts = 60 calories
- Kissing under the mistletoe = 30 calories
- Reading holiday stories = 30 calories
- Baking cookies = 250 calories



Self-Care Corner

Sure-fire ways to prevent hair loss

You can head off hair loss by changing the way you care for your hair, say the experts from the American Academy of Dermatology.

- **Do you vigorously towel dry your hair?** Instead of rubbing wet hair, which is more elastic and vulnerable to breaking, wrap your hair in a towel to absorb the water or let it air dry.

- **Do you brush or comb your hair when it is wet?** If you have straight hair and are of Caucasian or Asian descent, try to comb and brush your hair only when it is dry. Otherwise, you can stretch the strands and cause them to break. People who have tightly curled or textured hair or are of African descent should comb or brush their hair when it is wet. Doing so decreases the chance of hair breakage.

- **Do you use a blow dryer or curling iron?** The high heat from a blow dryer can actually boil the water in the hair shaft leaving the hair brittle. Let your hair partially air dry before you style or comb it.
- **Do you use styling products that promise a long-lasting hold?** While these products may give your hair unbeatable hold, using a comb to style your hair after you apply the product often causes the hair to break. Over time, this can lead to major hair loss. Reduce the use of these products to lessen hair loss.
- **Do you try to fit in 100 brush strokes per day?** It is a myth that 100 strokes a day promotes healthy hair. Vigorous brushing can strip the ends of the hair, causing split ends.
- **Do you color, perm, or relax your hair?** All processes damage the hair and can cause dry, brittle strands.
- **Do you wear braids, a ponytail, or hair extensions?** All of these styles pull on your hair and lead to breakage.
- **Do you skip the conditioner?** Use a conditioner after every shampoo. A conditioner cannot repair hair, but it can increase shine, decrease static electricity, improve strength, and offer some protection from harmful sun rays.

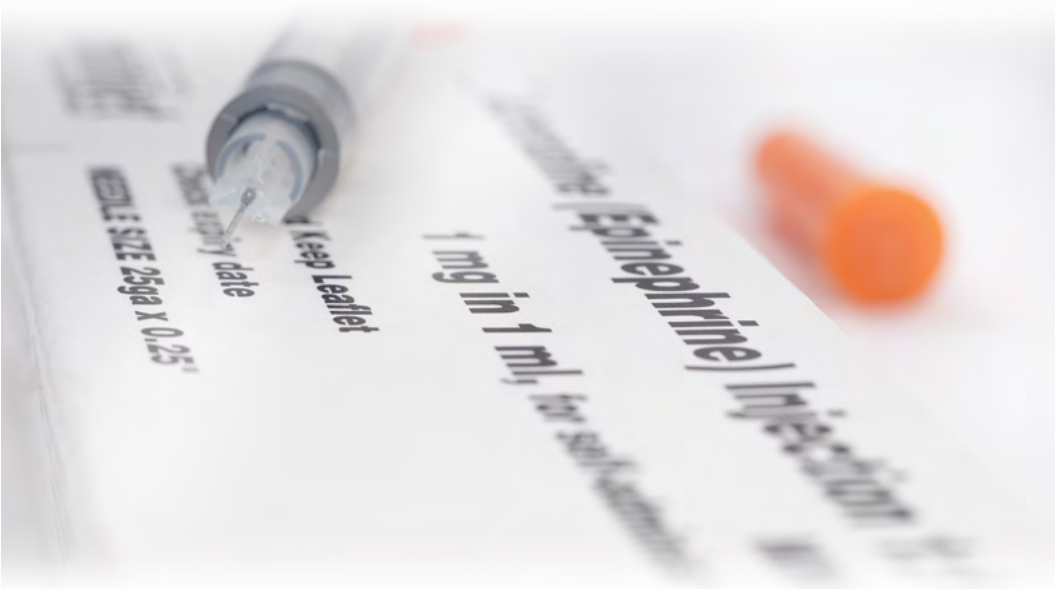


{Note: Many topics like the one on this page are contained in a medical self-care guide, such as Healthier at Home®, Health at Home®, and HealthyLife® Self-Care Guide, and/or addressed by a nurse advice line. They serve as excellent resources. If you have a self-care guide and/or access to a nurse advice line, use it whenever you are unsure about what to do for symptoms and health issues you are experiencing. They can help you make better decisions about when to seek professional assistance and when you can treat yourself at home using self-care.}



Medical News

Survive a super-duper allergic reaction



Hundreds of people die each year because of a sudden, serious allergic reaction. It's called anaphylaxis.

Know the symptoms and seek immediate treatment, advises the Allergy & Asthma Network Mothers of Asthmatics and the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI).

Anaphylaxis comes on fast, affects a person's whole body, and is life threatening. It can happen to anyone at any time.

But some people have risk factors such as being allergic to certain foods or stinging insects like bees or to some medications. Others may have a history of asthma.

"The first line of treatment is early administration of epinephrine. Most fatalities from anaphylaxis occur outside the home, especially when treatment is delayed," says allergist David Khan, MD, ACAAI program chair.

- Someone with a severe allergic reaction may not be able to breathe. Call 9-1-1.
- The best immediate treatment is to use an auto-injectable epinephrine pen (many people who know they have allergies carry these Epi-Pens). Then call 9-1-1. This is a medical emergency.
- If you are at risk, have a plan (for students, school nurses, and caregivers). The plan should list symptoms and state that immediate action can be life-saving, so outline what to do in order of importance.

To learn more about the symptoms and treatment of anaphylaxis visit www.aanma.org/anaphylaxis and www.AllergyAndAsthmaRelief.org.

Seeing pink



When the whites of your eyes turn pink, that's a condition called conjunctivitis, but most people just call it pink eye. The eye becomes inflamed and turns red and irritated. You may have a weepy discharge.

Kids get it at school and bring it home to pass around the family. Pink eye is highly contagious. Pink eye can be caused by a virus, bacteria or allergies.

If someone in your family has pink eye, use separate towels, disinfect toys and other objects that everyone handles, and make sure anyone exposed washes his or her hands often.

Treatment depends on the cause. A doctor may prescribe antibiotic drops if it's bacterial. Viral infections clear up on their own. Eye drops may help with the allergies.

Healthy Eating

Decode the mysteries of food expiration dates

Most U.S. food companies stamp lot codes and/or expiration dates on their products. But what do all these numbers really mean? The Institute of Food Technologists offers these answers. There are two types of codes:

- 1. Lot Code:** When manufacturers produce a product, they do so in batches. Each batch is given a unique series of numbers that makes it possible for manufacturers to track exactly when a problem occurred and which products need to be recalled.
- 2. Expiration Dates:** These are numbers represented in a date format (example: 10/2013) that tells consumers when a food product is either no longer safe to eat or might not taste as good as it did when originally produced.

There is little government regulation when it comes to expiration dates stamped on packages. According to the Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service, there are a few different types of dates you should look for:

- **Sell By** is a guide for stores to know how long they can display a product before its quality begins to weaken. You can eat an item for some time after the “sell by” date.
- **Best if Used By/Best Before** is a guide to the quality or flavor profile of the food and does not refer to safety. For example, sour cream may grow increasingly sour over time, but it remains safe to consume.
- **Use By** is the closest to an expiration date. Using products after the date is not recommended. In some cases, food may lose nutrients, develop potentially harmful bacteria, and lessen in quality.



Grab an apple instead of a candy bar when you're craving sweets. Fruit has fiber and sugar. It also takes longer to digest fruit than candy, so you won't get hunger pangs as quickly.

What does it mean?

What does it mean? The USDA uses the terms lean and extra lean when referring to meat. To qualify as lean, 3.5 ounces of beef must have fewer than 10 grams of fat, 4.5 grams or less of saturated fat, and fewer than 95 mg of cholesterol. To be labeled extra lean, the same amount of beef must have fewer than 5 grams of fat, fewer than 2 grams of saturated fat, and fewer than 95 milligrams of cholesterol, according to the Environmental Working Group (www.ewg.org). Read your labels.



Featured Recipe: Double Mocha Brownie Bites

Ingredients:

- 6 tablespoons canola oil
- 6 tablespoons Kahlua (or other coffee-flavored liqueur)
- 5 ounces unsweetened chocolate, coarsely chopped
- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon instant-espresso powder or instant-coffee granules
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 large eggs
- 1/2 cup egg substitute
- 2/3 cup whole wheat flour
- 1/3 cup unbleached white flour
- 3/4 cup bittersweet chocolate chips (semi-sweet chocolate chips can be substituted)

Directions

- Preheat oven to 375°. Line a 9 x 13 baking dish with foil, allowing 2 inches of foil to hang over ends of pan. Coat foil with canola cooking spray. In microwave-safe small bowl, combine canola oil, kahula and unsweetened chocolate and microwave on HIGH for about 1 minute. Stir until all the chocolate is melted and mixture is smooth.
- Pour mixture into mixing bowl. Beat in the sugar, espresso powder, vanilla, and salt (mixture will be grainy). Beat in eggs and egg substitute one at a time, beating after each addition until batter is smooth. In medium bowl, toss together whole wheat flour, unbleached white flour, and chocolate chips. Then stir into chocolate batter just until combined. Spread batter evenly in prepared baking dish.
- Bake in middle of oven for 20 minutes until the top is firm and edges are just beginning to pull away from sides of pan. Do not over bake. Cool in pan for 15 minutes. Lift brownies from pan by grasping both ends of foil. Cut into 50 squares by cutting the long end of the pan into 10 columns and the short end of the pan into 5 columns.

Makes about 50 brownie bites. Per bite: 80 calories, 1.5 g protein, 10 g carbohydrate, 4 g fat (1.5 g sat fat), 9 mg cholesterol, 1 g fiber, 32 mg sodium. Used with permission from Elaine Magee, the Recipe Doctor at www.recipedoctor.com.



Family Life

3 questions to ask your child's doctor

During your annual visit to the pediatrician, here are 3 simple questions to ask, suggests the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. Founded by the American Heart Association and the William J. Clinton Foundation, the Alliance is focused on reducing childhood obesity by 2015.

1. How is my child's weight? Does your child need to lose weight, gain weight, or maintain his or her current weight? Some kids will grow into their weight, and others may need to shed a few pounds.
2. What is my child's BMI? Body Mass Index is a number that predicts risk of disease by comparing a child's weight to his or her height. Ask your child's doctor to measure BMI. Know what the number means (the CDC has an online calculator at <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/dnpabmi/>).
3. How often should we visit? Ask about follow-up appointments and more tests, as necessary. And find out how often your doctor wants to measure your child's BMI.



A blended-family holiday—here's how to do it lovingly

Simple strategies can help reduce the discomfort and stress of navigating a blended-family holiday and help children develop positive memories, says psychologist, Dr. Josh Klapow, a wellness expert and associate professor in the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Public Health. Dr. Klapow's tips for a loving blended-family holiday are these:

- **Be realistic and objective.**

Know going into the holidays that it will not always go smoothly; be reminded that family and children are worth the effort. Seasonal family gatherings are situations where people most often feel anxious or stressed, and a blended-family event is no exception.

- **Be flexible.** Look at the winter calendar and remind yourself you can't fit three holidays in a single 24-hour period. Celebrate by opening gifts on a different date than last year, or plan on eating a holiday meal after an arts- or faith-based event where stepchildren feel welcome.

- **Don't manipulate.** Follow the rules of the custody agreement with your ex-spouse and make it your personal goal to stick with the plan. You may not get to be with your child on your favorite holiday. Do not try to manipulate the situation and cause heartache and guilt for yourself and others.



- **Be open.** Allow your children to share feelings and remind them they're welcome to do so. This can be a confusing time for kids. Letting them express frustration and anxiety will benefit them and possibly give you new ideas on making holidays a fun, joyful time.

Keep the home fires burning safely



During colder months, people keep their homes warm with various sources of heating, including portable heaters and fireplaces. The Red Cross suggests you take the following care to keep the home fires burning safely:

- Keep all potential sources of fuel like paper, clothing, bedding, curtains, or rugs at least 3 feet away from space heaters, stoves, or fireplaces.
- Portable heaters and fireplaces should never be left unattended. Turn off space heaters and make sure any embers in the fireplace are burned out before going to bed or leaving home.
- If you must use a space heater, place it on a level, hard, and nonflammable surface (such as a ceramic tile floor), not on rugs or carpets or near bedding or drapes. Keep children and pets away from space heaters.
- When buying a space heater, look for models that shut off automatically if the heater falls over.
- Never use a cooking range or oven to heat your home.
- Keep fire in your fireplace by using a glass or metal fire screen large enough to catch sparks and rolling logs.
- Have wood and coal stoves, fireplaces, chimneys, and furnaces professionally inspected and cleaned once a year.

Master credit card debt

Running up big credit card debt is more than a financial problem, suggests Joe Paretta, adjunct professor at Moravian College, in his book *Mastering the Card: Say Goodbye to Credit Card Debt Forever*. The book takes a positive, motivational approach to overcoming debt rather than focusing strictly on the numbers.



“You have to become your own advocate. Consumers have more power in working with credit card companies than they realize,” Paretta said.

Take these steps to master credit card debt:

- 1. Get it in writing.** Put something on paper and it becomes more meaningful. Take notes when negotiating rates with your credit card company.
- 2. Recognize your potential.** Consider all that you can do when you become debt free. The money that you have been paying toward interest could instead be used to make a positive difference in the world.
- 3. Give and take.** When you begin to pay down your debt, you will feel better about yourself. And others will see you differently. As a result, you will receive more things of higher quality than you did previously.
- 4. Look toward the future.** When you are debt free, you can broaden your horizons to pursue your dreams, such as beginning a new career or traveling to new places.

Quitting Tobacco

It's not easy to quit smoking or using tobacco. AHRQ Director Dr. Carolyn Clancy offers encouragement. This audio program features current news and information from the U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).



High blood cholesterol

High blood cholesterol—a major risk factor for heart disease—starts doing its damage during the late teens and early adult years. That's when cholesterol begins to build up in arteries. If you wait until middle age to do something about your cholesterol level, you will have lost years of prevention, says the National Cholesterol Education Program.

There's a health app for that

Like a lot of content on the Internet, health applications (or apps) for smartphones are not reviewed by medical experts. But you can find sound apps by following this advice from the health technology experts at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.

- **Set realistic expectations.** Before downloading, figure out what you need to do to achieve your health goals. Then figure out how an app on exercise or nutrition, for example, might help.
- **Avoid apps that promise too much.** You're not going to change a behavior overnight or even in a week. So an app that promises quick weight loss or quitting smoking for good by the end of the month probably won't produce the best results.
- **Research the developers.** Look in the app store or on the app's website to see who developed the app. Look for health apps developed by health professionals or endorsed by reputable hospitals or health organizations.
- **Test apps before committing.** Even the best app can't work its magic if it isn't used as recommended. Try several health apps before choosing one, and look for apps that are easy and convenient to use.



Get started with this list of apps from government agencies and selected health organizations at www.mdanderson.org/publications/focused-on-health/issues/2011-july/mobileappscancer.html.

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