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STEAM

VA Strategies to Educate and Address Menopause

Newsletter



MyHealthVet to Enable And Negotiate
for Shared Decision Making

Miami VA
Healthcare System
★★★★★

December 2015

A Year In Review

A Letter to Our Readers:

Dear Veterans,

We would like to take the time to thank you all for being such a wonderful audience. This will be our last newsletter but our websites will continue to be up and running. Should you have any more questions regarding menopause or aging after 45 please talk to you PACT Providers.

In the coming months we will be sending out a similar survey to the one you received last year about menopause and your care that the Miami VHAS. We would like to continue providing you with up to date information on this topic but cannot do so without your help. Please complete the surveys and return them to us in the enclosed pre-stamped envelopes.

Again thank you for a great year and we hope that you enjoyed the newsletters and events we hosted.

**Have a great holiday season
and wonderful new year!**

Caring for Yourself

In today's world we are finding it harder and harder to take the time to care for ourselves. The idea of putting our own health and wellbeing before our loved ones is hard for most women to put into action. However, taking care of yourself is one of the most important things you can do physically and mentally.

Here are some ways you can take care of yourself:

- See your doctor regularly and keep up with your medical exams.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Take breaks each day.
- Spend time with friends.
- Find a hobby or develop your interests.
- Eat healthy foods.
- Exercise as often as you can.
- Keep your health, legal, and financial information up-to-date.

Your emotional health

Between home, work, and other activities it can be difficult caring for your emotional health. Once stress has taken hold of you it becomes harder to let it go. Sometimes, you may feel discouraged, sad, lonely, frustrated, confused, or angry. These feelings are normal.

Here are some things you can say to yourself that might help you feel better:

- I'm doing the best I can.
- I'm not perfect, and that's okay.
- I can't control everything.
- Sometimes, I just need to do what works for right now.
- I will stop and enjoy the important moments in my life.
- I will try to get help from a counselor if things become too much for me.

Meeting your spiritual needs

Many of us have spiritual needs. Going to a church, temple, mosque, or meditating helps some people meet their spiritual needs. They like to be part of a faith community. For others, simply having a sense that larger forces are at work in the world helps meet their spiritual needs. Find a few moments each day to let your mind clear and relax. Use mindfulness techniques to help you stay in the moment.

All information for this newsletter can be found at:
www.womenshealth.gov

For more information on hormone therapies and menopause please visit our websites at:

www.menopause.varesearchfoundation.com

www.miami.va.gov/menopause

Brief Review on Menopause

What is Menopause?

Menopause is a normal time in each woman's life when her menstrual periods stop and she is no longer able to become pregnant. A woman reaches menopause around the age of 51 when she has not had a period for 12 months. There are three stages in menopause:

Peri-menopause: Women begin to feel symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, trouble sleeping and irregular periods.

Menopause: This occurs when a woman has not had a period for 12 months.

Post Menopause: Women may continue to have symptoms and are at risk of heart disease and weaker bones (osteoporosis).

Medical Treatments

Traditional Hormone Therapy

The FDA has approved many forms of hormones (tablets, gels, patches, creams) and are available in many doses for women who struggle with menopausal symptoms. They may contain only estrogen, only a progestogen, or both. Hormones can be lab created or natural (from soy or from a pregnant mare).

FDA-Approved Bioidentical Hormones

Bioidentical hormones come from plants and are chemically similar to those made by the body. Some products are approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), but others are not.

Compounded Bioidentical Hormones

Compounding pharmacies make hormonal preparations according to a health-care provider's specific instructions. Many use the term "bioidentical hormone" to suggest that these preparations are natural or the same as human hormones, and thus, are safe. Medical organizations and the FDA have determined that this is a "marketing" phrase and is not based on scientific evidence.

Symptoms:

Irregular periods. Cycles can occur more or less often and can be shorter, longer, heavier or lighter.

Hot flashes/flushes. Sudden feeling of heat in the upper body or throughout. Often comes with profuse sweat.

Night sweats. Nighttime hot flashes that may result in trouble sleeping.

Trouble sleeping. It may become harder to fall asleep and/or stay asleep through the entire night.

Vaginal Dryness. Lower estrogen levels make vaginal walls drier and thinner, cause discomfort and may make sexual intercourse uncomfortable.

Changing feelings about sex. Some women become less aroused during menopause and lose interest and others become more comfortable with their sexuality.

Emotions. Mood swings, irritability, or crying may occur.

Osteoporosis. Occurs when bones become thin and weak. It can lead to loss of height and broken bones.

Other changes. Forgetfulness/problems focusing, weight gain, and stiff or achy joints.

Natural Steps to Ease Symptoms

- **Eating healthy.** Eating a balanced diet can raise your energy and protect your health. Limit alcohol or caffeine, which can affect sleep.
- **Quit smoking.** Smoking may cause hot flashes, weakens bones, and irritate your bladder, which may be more sensitive during menopause.
- **Exercise.** Regular exercise helps lower your weight, improves your sleep, strengthens your bones, and elevates your mood.
- **Try stress reduction techniques.** Regularly practicing stress reduction techniques like meditation or yoga can help you cope with your symptoms more easily.
- **If you're overweight, losing weight might help with hot flashes.**
- **Prescription medications used for other conditions** such as medications for epilepsy, depression, and high blood pressure may help with hot flashes and mood swings.
- **Prescription medicines for vaginal discomfort** may be an option if OTC treatments don't work. These include estrogen creams, tablets, or rings that you put in your vagina.

Health Watch

Heart Disease

Five times more women die of heart disease than of breast cancer and is the number one killer of women.

What can you do to help prevent or manage CAD?

- **Exercise!** Staying active can lower your risk of heart disease.
- **Eat Healthy-** Eating fatty foods has a direct effect on arteries, blood pressure, and sugar levels. Add fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy, fish, beans, nuts, and lean meats to your diet.
- **Know Your Numbers-** Have lab work done regularly that checks for cholesterol (total, LDL, HDL, and triglycerides) and blood sugar as these can tell you a great deal about your heart.
- **Take Care of Yourself-** Stress, anxiety, depression, and lack of sleep have all been linked to heart disease. It is important to take time to yourself ,relax, and get enough sleep each day.

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a disease that weakens the bones making fragile bones more likely to fracture (break).

A Few Risk Factors:

- Being a woman over the age of 50 or postmenopausal
- Family history of osteoporosis or fractures after age 50
- Having rheumatoid arthritis, type 1 diabetes, premature menopause (before age 45), asthma, or lupus
- Had a fracture from doing regular daily activities or falling from a standing or sitting position

What you can do

- Get Enough Vitamin D
- Make Sure to Take Your Daily Recommended Dose of Calcium
- Eat Foods Rich In Calcium
- Exercise

Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is often found during early screening, before a woman has physical symptoms. Risk increases as women age. Women over age 50 are more likely to get breast cancer and having a close family member who had breast cancer increases risk. Inheriting gene mutations such as BRCA1 and BRCA2 increases your risk .

Symptoms

- A lump or thick/firm tissue in or near your breast or under your arm
- A change in your breast's shape or size
- Nipple discharge (not breast milk)
- Skin changes on breast, areola, or nipple
- Changes in your nipples such as them turning into the breast

What you can do:

- Schedule a regular clinical breast exam and mammogram (time varies according to your age and individual risks)
- Know how your breasts normally look and feel in order to report unusual changes to your doctor.
- Conduct your own breast self-exams at home regularly

Upcoming Programs

At the Miami VAHS we strive to provide you with the best healthcare available. While our menopause program is coming to an end here are two programs we are excited to present to you. Please contact us if you are interested in either program and we will make sure you are contacted when they begin. Thank you for your service and all that you do.

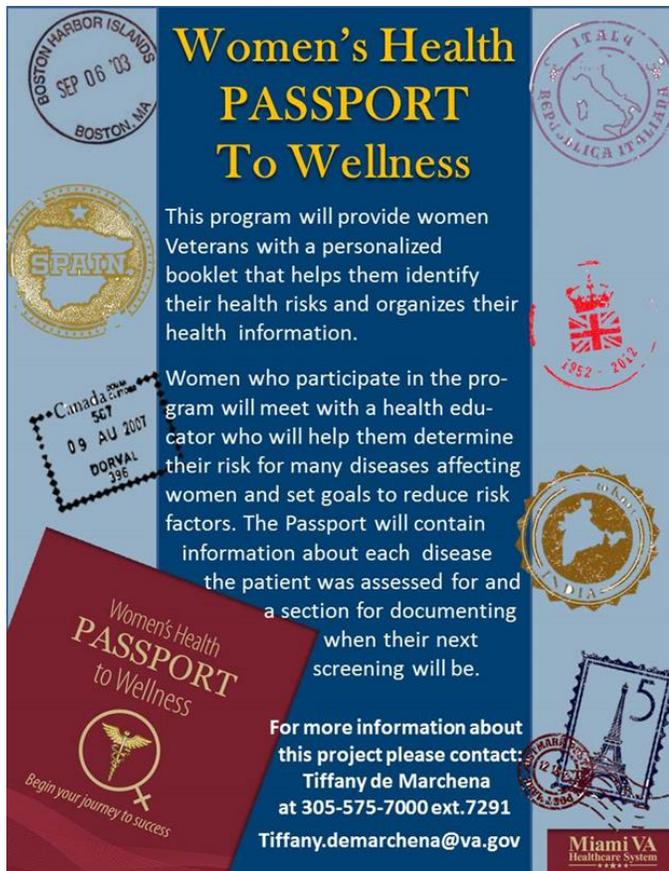


Lets Have A Heart to Heart

Are you being treated for heart disease? Are you at risk?

The Bruce W. Carter Medical Center is now offering a cardiovascular group clinic especially for women.

For more information please call 575-7000 ext. 7001



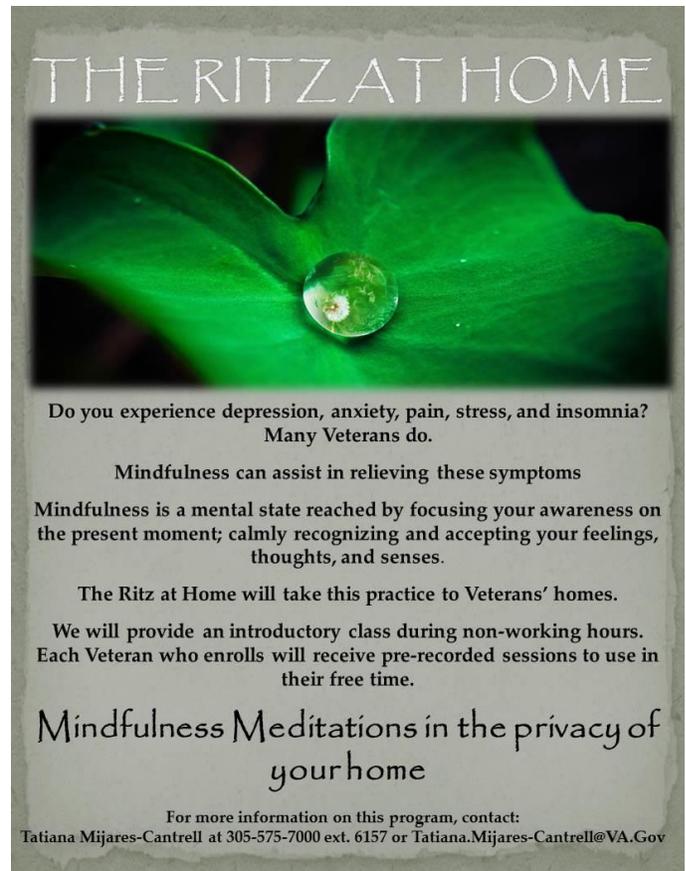
Women's Health PASSPORT To Wellness

This program will provide women Veterans with a personalized booklet that helps them identify their health risks and organizes their health information.

Women who participate in the program will meet with a health educator who will help them determine their risk for many diseases affecting women and set goals to reduce risk factors. The Passport will contain information about each disease the patient was assessed for and a section for documenting when their next screening will be.

For more information about this project please contact:
Tiffany de Marchena
at 305-575-7000 ext.7291
Tiffany.demarchena@va.gov

Miami VA Healthcare System



THE RITZ AT HOME

Do you experience depression, anxiety, pain, stress, and insomnia?
Many Veterans do.

Mindfulness can assist in relieving these symptoms

Mindfulness is a mental state reached by focusing your awareness on the present moment; calmly recognizing and accepting your feelings, thoughts, and senses.

The Ritz at Home will take this practice to Veterans' homes.

We will provide an introductory class during non-working hours. Each Veteran who enrolls will receive pre-recorded sessions to use in their free time.

Mindfulness Meditations in the privacy of your home

For more information on this program, contact:
Tatiana Mijares-Cantrell at 305-575-7000 ext. 6157 or Tatiana.Mijares-Cantrell@VA.Gov

Contact Info:

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