

WRIISC *Advantage*

SPRING 2016

Learn more about the roles of
DIET/NUTRITION and
HEALTH

The benefits of eating
WHOLE FOODS

EXERCISE for
CHRONIC CONDITIONS

maintaining and sustaining

GOOD HEALTH ▶

There are many factors that can impact our health. Lifestyle choices, such as what types of food we eat, how much we exercise, maintaining healthy relationships, trying to reduce stress, and sleep habits are all important in determining good health. This edition of *WRIISC Advantage* provides useful information for Veterans on the roles of diet/nutrition, exercise, and weight management in maintaining and sustaining good health.

You Are What You Eat...

DIET/NUTRITION is an important component of health and wellness for all Americans and an important part of post-deployment health. Your daily food choices can help promote and maintain good health and prevent many chronic diseases (like heart disease and diabetes) and treat others. Many Veterans seen at the War

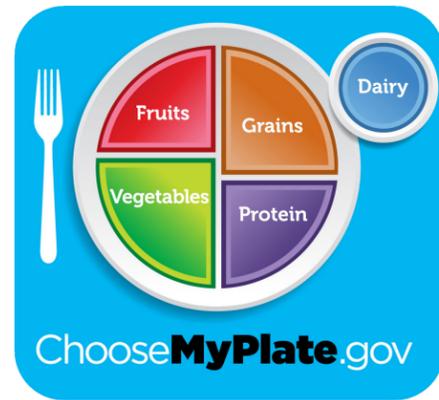


Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC) often leave with a recommendation for dietary changes to better address specific symptoms and improve overall health. There are also some basic nutrition guidelines to follow for good health that hold true for everyone regardless of individual health status, lifestyle, and food likes and dislikes. The U.S. Office of Disease and Health Promotion's 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans can be found at www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/. These guidelines include:

- ✓ Choose a healthy eating pattern at an appropriate calorie level to help achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, support nutrient adequacy, and reduce the risk of chronic disease.
- ✓ Include a variety of foods from the major food groups: fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and lean protein including beans and other legumes, nuts and seeds, and healthy fats.
- ✓ Limit calories from added sugars and saturated fats and reduce sodium intake.

Remember, what you eat is just as important as the amount you eat! By adjusting input and output levels, you can control whether you gain, lose, or maintain your weight and are at a healthy weight for your height and age. Through portion control and eating less, your body will get used to becoming

full after consuming a smaller quantity of food. In order to eat healthier and therefore live healthier, focus on making small changes, one at a time.



MyPlate from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (www.choosemyplate.gov/dietary-guidelines) replaces the food pyramid concept. The MyPlate tool will help you to choose your portions of each food group in the most healthful way. Think of each change made as a step on your path to living a healthier life! 🌱



HealthPOWER! is an award-winning, quarterly publication from the VHA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, highlighting health promotion and disease prevention activities in VA. The Winter 2016 issue is now available: www.prevention.va.gov/Publications/Newsletters/2016/HealthPOWER_Prevention_News_Winter_2016.asp.

Personalized Dietary Plans

A **PERSONALIZED DIETARY PLAN** made by a dietitian or health care provider will help take into account any individual conditions and recommend the type of diet that would work best under special individual circumstances. For example:

- ▶ Certain medical conditions including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and rheumatoid arthritis are linked to inflammation in the body. The **ANTI-INFLAMMATORY DIET** aims to decrease the amount of inflammation by increasing intake of foods that reduce inflammation and by taking out foods that can trigger inflammation.

Three key points include:

- Decrease unhealthy fats.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables.
- Increase fiber intake.

**University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. Patient Handout: Anti-Inflammatory Diet.*

- ▶ Sometimes certain foods can actually make health issues or symptoms worse! An **ELIMINATION DIET** can be useful in determining if specific foods – or “trigger foods” – might be the cause.

THERE ARE FOUR STEPS IN DETERMINING TRIGGER FOODS:

Planning	Avoiding	Challenging	Creating
With your health care provider, discuss which foods might be contributing to symptoms. Keep a food diary of what you eat and the symptoms you experience.	Once you have determined the food that you suspect may be a trigger for your symptoms, avoid that food for two weeks. Read food labels carefully during this step. If you feel worse or your symptoms increase while avoiding that food, consult with your health care provider.	If your symptoms have improved in the two-week avoidance period, reintroduce the eliminated food to your diet. If you have eliminated multiple foods in the avoidance step, introduce each food back into your diet in three-day intervals.	The creation of a new nutrition plan based on the results of your elimination diet is the last step.

Always make sure you are getting adequate nutrition when trying this diet.

**University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. Patient Handout: Elimination Diet.*

- ▶ The **CARDIOMETABOLIC FOOD PLAN**, developed by the Institute of Functional Medicine, is suggested to treat both cardiovascular and metabolic diseases.

This plan is designed for:

- Those with or who have risk factors for cardiovascular disease.
- Those with or who have risk factors for metabolic syndrome or type 2 diabetes.

Through dietary changes the plan allows for the body to more effectively regulate inflammation, insulin, and metabolism. It works best when personalized for the patient by a health care provider.

**Richmond Integrative and Functional Medicine (RIFM). (2015). *Cardiometabolic Food Plan: Comprehensive Guide*.*

Before trying a diet for a specific health condition or symptom, talk with your health care provider to be sure that it is safe/appropriate for you or obtain a referral for an appointment with a VA dietitian/nutritionist. 🌱

WHOLE FOODS DIET:

What is it? What are the benefits? Where can I start?

EATING A WHOLE FOODS DIET* relies primarily on foods that are in their natural state with minimal processing. A whole foods diet can be beneficial for all Americans so it is appropriate for Veterans, too! Many vitamins and minerals work together to make the systems in the body function properly. A whole foods diet provides micronutrients that are well absorbed and utilized, and are in the proper proportion to one another. It also provides other benefits such as phytonutrients, which are compounds that are unique to plants and have demonstrated many anti-disease benefits. A whole foods approach also provides fiber which is essential for optimal health but is often deficient in the Standard American



Diet. In addition, this natural diet does not include harmful chemical preservatives that are used to extend the shelf life of processed foods.

Try moving toward a whole foods diet by taking one step at a time. You can use each month to focus on a different food group. Perhaps you can begin by focusing on increasing vegetable intake and replacing processed food items with fresh fruits and vegetables.

Another approach might be to start by focusing on individual meals. There are many ways that you can make a slow but steady transition from processed foods to foods closer to their natural state. Make 2016 the year to transition to whole foods! 🌱

*Texas Tech University Health Science. (2012). *Whole Foods Diet*. *Live Strong. (2015). *The Whole Foods Diet Weight Loss Eating Plan*.

What about Chocolate?

Studies show that our mothers are right: we should eat our vegetables. But scientists have also found that the pleasure of chocolate supplies anti-inflammatory compounds which are good for our hearts and our brains. Cocoa is rich in polyphenols, an antioxidant found in many fruits and vegetables as well as wine and tea. Chocolates labeled with a higher percentage of cocoa will generally provide a higher 'dose' of these good components; look for products with chocolate listed as the first ingredient, not sugar. A typical Hershey bar is only 11% cocoa, so it's mostly sugar, milk products, emulsifiers, and flavorings.

Recent studies suggest that specific compounds found in chocolate may offer several heart-healthy benefits by lowering blood pressure, reducing risk of blood clots, and decreasing bad cholesterol. The brain also benefits from chocolate by reducing the risk of stroke, improving memory, elevating mood, and lowering stress hormone levels. Some studies have shown that people who eat good quality dark chocolate may be more likely to maintain a healthy weight, as chocolate seems to reduce cravings for sweet, salty, and fatty foods. Darker chocolate tends to be more satisfying than milk chocolate because of its higher fiber and intensity. While chocolate can be a healthy treat, its calories still add up, so it should be consumed in moderation. Enjoying an ounce or two of good dark chocolate a few times a week can be a treat even your mother would approve. 🌱



Veterans, Aerobic Exercise, and Chronic Pain

A COMMON RECOMMENDATION made to Veterans who are evaluated at the WRIISC is to include a regimen of exercise along with a healthy diet. Depending on a Veteran's health status and concerns, this recommendation focuses on the Veterans beginning a program of low-impact exercise- starting with as little as five minutes per day, three times a week, and gradually increasing the time and frequency to 30 minutes per day, five times a week as tolerated over a period of about six months.

For Veterans with chronic pain, we provide an easy-to-follow chart in our WRIISC fact sheet "Exercise to Manage Pain" which is located on our website

Finding the right exercise program can provide an enjoyable way to "live healthier."

(www.WarRelatedIllness.va.gov/education/factsheets.asp). WRIISC exercise recommendations often include a program of low-impact aerobic exercise, strength training, and stretching. If you are a Veteran with a knee or back injury, swimming can provide an excellent opportunity for aerobic exercise with low impact. Some VA facilities provide opportunities for therapeutic swimming, and the U.S. Masters Swimming program (www.usms.org), a non-profit national program, provides opportunities to improve fitness in a positive social environment and friendly competitive fashion. Local YMCA programs can also provide opportunities for exercise at reduced cost for Veterans as a result of a VA-YMCA partnership. 🌱

Research Supports Exercise for Chronic Conditions

INCREASING EVIDENCE SHOWS that exercise can be beneficial when prescribed as treatment for more conditions than just chronic pain. In a 2015 review article*, Pedersen and Saltin reported on using exercise as treatment for over 20 chronic conditions as gathered from published research papers. They found strong evidence for exercise as treatment in psychiatric, neurological, cardiovascular, and metabolic diseases to name a few. From the evidence, they provided examples of recommended "prescriptions" for each condition and defined recommended intensity using the Borg Rating of Perceived Exertion (Borg RPE, see chart to the right). Most of the recommended exercise prescriptions incorporate both aerobic exercise and strength (resistance) training guidelines. For example, a prescription for exercise as treatment for type 2 diabetes provides guidelines for taking medications and blood glucose monitoring, as well as dietary adjustments to complement the exercise program. The evidence-based exercise program includes a combination of aerobic and resistance training and suggests that high-intensity exercise improves glycemic control more than low-intensity exercise. In this context, incorporating interval training is beneficial. For example, an exercise plan that includes 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise (Borg 12-13) a day should incorporate short bursts of high-intensity exercise (Borg 15-16) within it. The strength training program should include exercises that target all the major muscle groups with a warm-up and cool down period. As always, check with your health care provider before beginning any exercise program. 🌱

Rating of Perceived Exertion Borg RPE Scale		
6		How you feel when lying in bed or sitting in a chair relaxed. Little or no effort.
7	Very, very light	
8		
9	Very light	
10		Target range: How you should feel with exercise or activity.
11	Fairly light	
12		
13	Somewhat hard	
14		How you felt with the hardest work you have ever done. Don't work this hard!
15	Hard	
16		
17	Very hard	
18		
19	Very, very hard	
20	Maximum exertion	

*Pedersen. BK, Saltin, B. (2015). *Exercise as medicine- evidence for prescribing exercise as therapy in 26 different chronic diseases. Scand J Med Sci Sports. 2015; (Suppl. 3) 25: 1-72.*

Around the WRIISC News



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CA WRIISC

Yoga Program and VA Palo Alto Recreation Facilities Help Local Veteran

THE CA WRIISC YOGA PROGRAM has been in place since the beginning of 2010. Louise Mahoney, Deputy Director of Education and Risk Communication at the CA WRIISC has been at the forefront of this effort to help Veterans seeking treatment for chronic symptoms and better health outcomes.

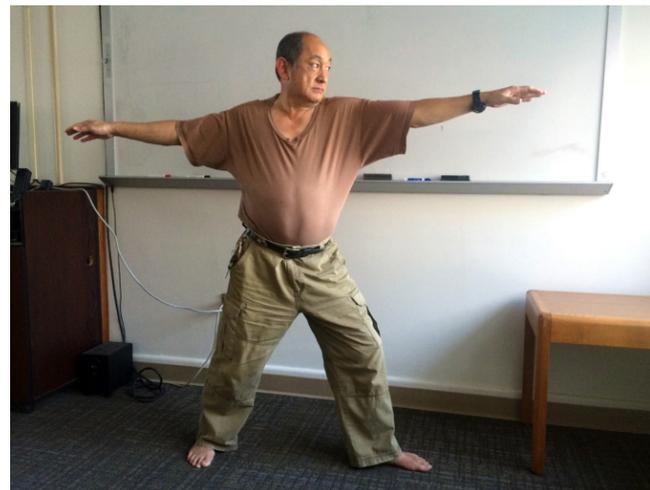
Dennis Kim, the program's very first Yoga program participant, served as a combat rifleman with the Marines in Vietnam and as a Marine Reservist until he was medically retired in 2003. Dennis severely injured his left arm and shoulder in a parachute accident while serving in the Reserves and has limited range of motion in that arm. Although he is retired from the military he is still active as an American Red Cross certified CPR instructor and certified EMT, and teaches CPR classes regularly.



Veteran Dennis Kim strikes a tree pose which establishes strength and balance in the legs and helps him feel centered, steady, and grounded.

During a recent hospital visit, Dennis provided Louise with an update. He reported that his current exercise routine, which includes yoga, swimming, and biking, keeps him looking young and feeling healthy. After he started the regular exercise program, he found that he was much more enthusiastic about "a lot more things" and "not as lazy." He can do more and as a result, things have changed for him. Dennis

reported that yoga has helped him in many ways, particularly with symptoms from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He also says that the yoga has helped with anger management - it "calms me down," "stretches me out," and is beneficial for balance. Yoga also helps with his lower back pain, particularly the Warrior series involving standing poses and twists.



In a Warrior II pose, Veteran Dennis Kim strengthens his legs and arms while increasing his stamina.

In June, Dennis will be competing in swimming in the Valor Games. Regardless of the outcome of those games, Dennis is certainly a winner and a shining example of the healing powers of yoga and exercise.

DC WRIISC

Welcome, Dr. Rachel Stewart!

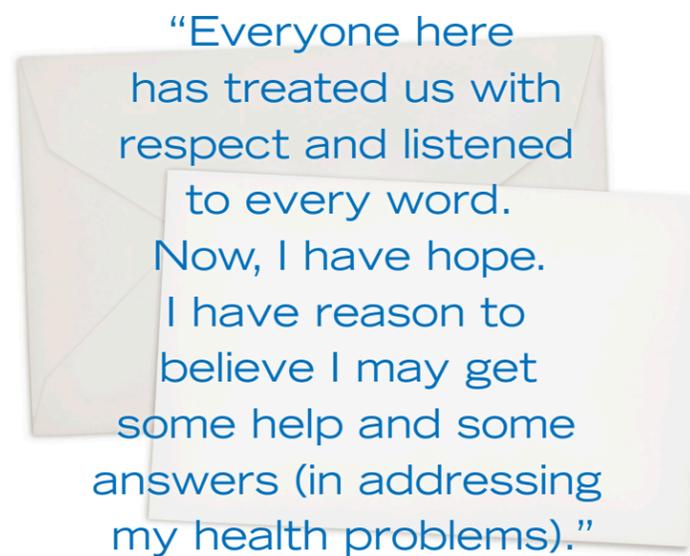
DR. RACHEL STEWART recently joined the DC WRIISC team as a clinical social worker. Dr. Stewart has been with VA for over six years, during which she has served Veterans in several programs and areas of the DC VA Medical Center. For over five years she worked independently as the mental health professional covering the Emergency Room and the hospital during off-hour tours. She was instrumental in the development and implementation of the Fast Track program in the Emergency Department

which helped streamline patient flow and increase customer satisfaction while providing excellent care to our Veterans. Prior to coming to the VA, Dr. Stewart already had over a decade of clinical experience focusing on serious mental illness in a variety of settings, both inpatient and outpatient, and both civilian and government. With over 12 years of experience and two state independent clinical licenses, Dr. Stewart is excited to bring her expertise to the DC WRIISC team.

NJ WRIISC

Clinical Program: Making a Difference

WRIISC CLINICIANS CONTINUE to put the Veteran at the center of our clinical program while evaluating the most complex patient cases. A Veteran who recently visited the NJ WRIISC wrote a personal thank you.



"Everyone here has treated us with respect and listened to every word. Now, I have hope. I have reason to believe I may get some help and some answers (in addressing my health problems)."

We are extremely proud that Veterans continue to report their high satisfaction with our unique program and services and are honored to assist our Nation's heroes on the road to living a better, healthier life. 🐶

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See more by visiting:



www.move.va.gov