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 as important as the amount you eat.
- 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.
- 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

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!

Personalized Dietary Plans

A PERSONALIZED DIETARY PLAN made by a dietician 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
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.

Avoiding
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 your health care provider.

Challenging
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.

Creating
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.


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.

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.
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. Coca 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 compounds; 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.

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

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 foods 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 the systems in the body function properly. A whole foods diet provides macronutrients that are well absorbed and utilized, and are in the proper proportion to one another. It also provides other benefits such as phyttonutrients, 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.
Around the WRIISC News

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.

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 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.

WRIISC Advantage

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ATTENTION READER: Do you prefer to receive the WRIISC Advantage newsletter electronically? Email us at wriisc.nj@va.gov with your full name and preferred email address.

VA's MOVE! Weight Management Program promotes health with tools designed to improve the lives of Veterans through healthy eating and increased physical activity.

See more by visiting: www.move.va.gov