

# THE northern

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VA Northern California Health Care System

WINTER 2015-2016

## Stress-Busting Tips to Help You Through the Holidays and Winter Months page 4

*In This Edition...*  
FEND OFF THE FLU!  
HEPATITIS C BREAKTHROUGH



# VA Northern California HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

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### About This Picture:

VA Northern California Health Care System honors all the hard work of our logistics team members, who ensure supplies get to our Veterans and staff when needed.

Story Photo Credit: Jon Nolan Paresa

# Fend Off the Flu!

By Kristy Prausch

**T**he flu (influenza) is a contagious respiratory virus that causes mild to severe illness and can result in hospitalization or death. It's important to know how to protect yourself from getting seasonal flu. Here are flu-fighting tips to keep you well.

## Six Ways to Prevent Seasonal Flu



### 1. Get your flu shot!

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine each season.



### 2. Know how the flu is spread.

When a person with flu sneezes, coughs, talks, or laughs, the flu virus can spread into the air as droplets; the droplets can spread to people and surfaces up to six feet away. The flu virus can spread to your hands if you touch anything that has the virus on it; then if you touch your eyes, nose, or mouth, you might get the flu. People can spread flu to others starting about one day before they feel sick and up to five days after getting sick.



### 3. Know the symptoms of the flu.

Symptoms include a fever (100°F body temperature or higher), body and muscle aches, headache, feeling tired or weak, cough, sore throat, and runny or stuffy nose.



### 4. Clean your hands and surfaces.

Clean your hands often by washing with soap and water or by using hand sanitizers. Clean your hands before eating or preparing food, before and after caring for someone who is sick, after coughing or sneezing, and after using the bathroom. Clean surfaces that are touched often, such as phones, faucets, light switches, countertops, door and cabinet handles, keyboard and mouse, and TV remotes. The flu virus can live on surfaces for up to 48 hours.



### 5. Cover your coughs and sneezes.

Use clean tissues and discard after each use. Cough or sneeze into your sleeve when you don't have a tissue. Always clean your hands after coughing or sneezing.



### 6. Stay at home when sick.

Because the flu spreads easily from person to person, stay home when you are sick. Studies show you are most contagious and likely to spread the flu virus to others for at least five days after your first symptoms start and at least 48 hours after your last fever.

The flu is unpredictable and its severity can vary widely from one season to the next. Visit this site for additional information: <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/flu/index.asp>

# *Stress-Busting Tips to Help You Through the Holidays and Winter Months*

By Tara Ricks

**T**he winter months and welcoming in a new year can be a wonderful time for many—full of joy, happiness, and family get-togethers. But for some Veterans it can be a very stressful time, with reminders of loss, sadness, and loneliness. No matter what you are experiencing, it is important to know that there are many ways of coping with stress and many people to help when you need to talk.



“Even with all the fun the winter months can bring, if we don’t manage our stress and continue to care for ourselves, it can feel overwhelming and eventually compound into bigger issues,” said Dr. David Gellerman, chief of mental health.

Try some of the following tips.

- 1. Get moving!** Often we neglect our body during the holidays and the winter—but this is the time when we need to exercise the most. If you aren’t motivated to do a full workout, try taking a walk or attending a quick exercise class. Make time for you and your health.
- 2. Active meditation.** Pick up an adult coloring book. It sounds crazy right, adult coloring? But it’s not. It is one of the newest forms of active meditation. Psychologists say adult coloring is growing in popularity because the stress-busting benefits are so compelling. This activity allows people to let go of their everyday stressors and focus on being creative and shifting the mind back to a relaxed state. You can buy adult coloring books online or at any big-box store.
- 3. Express yourself.** If you simply can’t go to another party or attend another function, it is okay to respectfully decline. You are one person with many things to manage; pick and choose which events and activities are most important to you and go from there.

- 4. Manage your time.** Pick three tasks daily that need to be accomplished and only do more if time allows. By focusing on the most important tasks, you can reduce feelings of being overwhelmed.
- 5. Lists, lists, and more lists.** Keep a pad of paper nearby to write down what you need to do. Writing things down can help reduce stress and worrying about forgetting something.
- 6. Let go and breathe.** Enjoy the little things, be it good food or the sound of music in the background. Being mindful of all the good in our lives and taking a few deep breaths can help re-adjust our focus and get us back into the spirit of the new year.



It’s normal to feel sadness during the holidays and winter months; however, if you are experiencing more intense feelings of stress that are hurting your health or causing physical symptoms, you are not alone—your VA family is here to help. In addition to all of the stress-busters above, the most important thing to do is to talk to someone.

- 1. Make an appointment.** Call your VA mental health physician to schedule an appointment. Sometimes you just need to talk, and that is okay.
- 2. VA Crisis Line.** This confidential call can help sort out intense feelings, especially if you feel like hurting yourself. Contact the Veterans Crisis Line at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)** and **press option 1**. You may also reach confidential help by sending a **text to 838255** or through online chat at [www.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net).

Take time to refocus and remind yourself that the holidays are a time to give, share joy, and spend precious moments with family and friends. We all experience stress at various levels—the key is to manage it, so it doesn’t manage us.



## Mental Health Numbers Throughout the VA Northern California Health Care System

Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

Sacramento Medical Center.....916-366-5420  
 Chico Outpatient Clinic.....530-879-5050  
 Fairfield Outpatient Clinic .....925-372-2033  
 Mare Island Outpatient Clinic.....925-372-2033  
 Martinez Outpatient Clinic.....925-372-2033

McClellan Outpatient Clinic.....916-561-7461  
 Oakland Outpatient Clinic.....510-587-3428  
 Redding Outpatient Clinic.....530-226-7669  
 Yreka Rural Health Clinic.....530-226-7669  
 Yuba City Outpatient Clinic.....530-751-4500

# Hepatitis C Breakthrough

By Amanda Mina

**I**n 1991, a Veteran seeking care for Hepatitis C was most often prescribed a six-month treatment of Interferon. This drug was known to help the immune system fight off the affected cells, but often caused unwelcome adverse effects. In the years that followed, medical research into the drug's formulation increased the success rate from 6 percent to around 50 percent. In 2011, newer therapies that targeted the construction of the virus within the cell increased the success rate further, to around 70 percent.

Last year, breakthrough drugs called Harvoni and Viekira Pak were introduced, which cut Hepatitis C-treatment time down to 12 weeks and increased treatment success rates to 93–99 percent. These new treatments definitely come with a cost—around \$84,000 in the private sector. However, our Veterans (if found to be a good candidate) can receive the treatments through a normal visit and prescription copays.

Veterans seeking Harvoni or Viekira Pak treatment for Hepatitis C can expect to answer a series of questions from a physician to ensure they are a good candidate. If found to qualify for one of the treatment plans, Veterans will attend a one-time group visit, during which they will receive the first series of medication and instructions on when to complete check-ups, lab visits, and prescription refills.

Dr. Anthony Albanese, deputy chief of staff at VA Northern California Health Care System,



Story Photo Credits: Jon-Nolan Paresa

considers it a win for everybody. "Rather than look at it as a cost-per-treatment, I look at it as a cost-per-cure for our Veterans," said Dr. Albanese. "It can be one or more pills per day, depending on the type of virus you have—but no more injections!" He also notes the treatments do not have as many side effects, due to the drug attacking the virus, not the body.



It is important for our Veterans to speak to their physician to see if they qualify for the treatment plans. If a patient begins treatment but is not careful about maintaining the treatment schedule, then treatment will be stopped because it has lost its effectiveness; the virus can mutate if medications are not taken properly. Veterans who are alcohol and/or drug users will not receive treatment because studies have not yet been done to determine any harmful interactions. For more information, visit [www.hepatitis.va.gov](http://www.hepatitis.va.gov), and then make an appointment to talk with your doctor.

# Benefits 101



**Disability Compensation** is a tax-free monetary benefit paid to Veterans with disabilities that are a result of a disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service. Compensation may also be paid for post-service disabilities that are considered related or secondary to disabilities occurring in service and for disabilities presumed to be related to circumstances of military service, even though they may arise after service. Generally, the degrees of disability specified are also designed to compensate for considerable loss of working time from exacerbations or illnesses.

**Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC)** is a tax-free monetary benefit generally payable to a surviving spouse, child, or parent of Service members who died while on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training or to survivors of Veterans who died from their service-connected disabilities. DIC for parents is an income-based benefit.

**Special Monthly Compensation (SMC)** is an additional tax-free benefit that can be paid to Veterans, their spouses, surviving spouses, and parents. For Veterans, SMC is a higher rate of compensation paid due to special circumstances such as the need of aid and attendance by another person or a specific disability, such as loss of use of one hand or leg. For spouses and surviving spouses, this benefit is commonly referred to as aid and attendance and is paid based on the need of aid and attendance by another person.

**Other Benefits** the VA provides are additional housing and insurance benefits to Veterans with disabilities, including Adapted Housing grants, Service-Disable Veterans' Insurance, and Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance.

### How to Apply?

The best way to apply for disability compensation is by obtaining an eBenefits account (<https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/homepage>) and applying online.

When applying for compensation benefits, you must have access to the following information:

- Discharge or separation papers (DD214 or equivalent)
- Medical evidence (doctor and hospital reports)
- Dependency records (marriage and children's birth certificates)

Alternatively, you may print and mail in the VA Form 21-526EZ, Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits, or call VA at 1-800-827-1000 to have the form mailed to you.

Go to [www.benefits.va.gov](http://www.benefits.va.gov) or visit us at one of the following locations:

### Oakland Regional Benefit Office

1301 Clay St., North Tower, 12th Floor  
Oakland, CA 94612

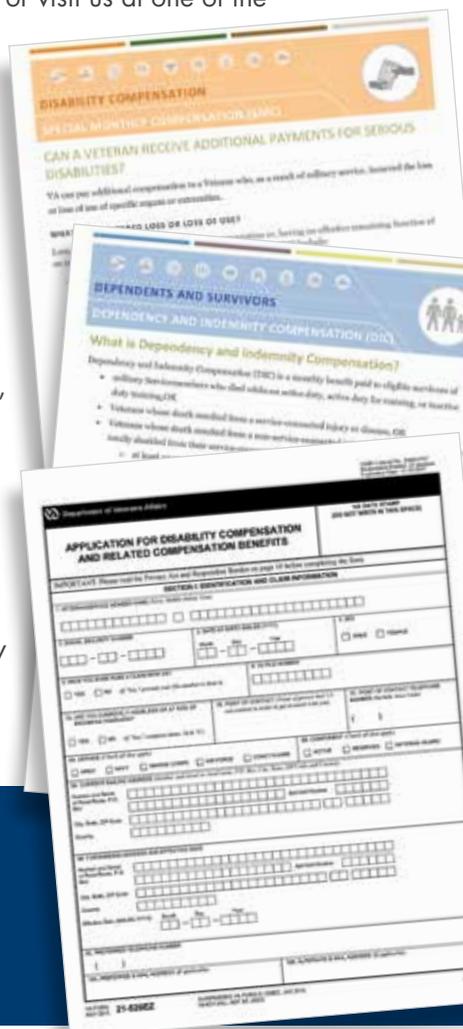
Open to the public.  
Monday–Friday,  
9 a.m.–4 p.m.

For general correspondence, eligibility letters, and other inquiries.

### Sacramento VBA Satellite Office

10365 Old Placerville Rd  
Sacramento, CA 95827

Open Tuesday and Thursday only; registration for same-day appointments begins at 8:30 a.m.



Visit [benefits.va.gov](http://benefits.va.gov) for more information.

# Healthy Recipe!

## Slow Cooker Baked Oatmeal with Bananas and Nuts

Yield: 8 servings

### Ingredients

- 4 cups uncooked old fashioned oats
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon cinnamon
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 cups applesauce
- 2 bananas, sliced
- 1 cup raisins
- 1 cup chopped pecans or walnuts
- 2 large eggs
- 2 cups low-fat milk
- Maple syrup (optional)

### Directions

1. Stir the oats, brown sugar, cinnamon, baking powder, and kosher salt in a large bowl until well combined. Stir in ½ cup of the raisins.
2. Spray the bowl of your slow cooker with cooking spray. Spread 1 cup of the applesauce evenly on the bottom of the bowl. Layer half of the oat mixture on top of the applesauce. Sprinkle with half of the banana slices and half of the nuts. Dollop and spread the last cup of



Story Photo Credit: FoodieCrush.com

the applesauce on top and then pour the rest of the oat mixture on top. Top with the remaining banana slices. Sprinkle the ½ cup of raisins and the remaining nuts on top of the bananas.

3. Whisk the eggs and milk together and pour evenly over the oatmeal.
4. Cover and bake for 4–6 hours on low or for 2 hours on high.
5. Serve hot with maple syrup and milk over the top if desired.

Courtesy of FoodieCrush.com



To register, please call Kristi Scott, MyhealthVet Coordinator, at 916-843-7108 or email her at Kristi.Scott@va.gov

My Health, My Care: 24/7 <sup>Online</sup> Access to VA

### Connect with VA Northern California Health Care System

Valley Division—Sacramento VA Medical Center  
 10535 Hospital Way  
 Mather, CA 95655  
 916-843-7000 | 800-382-8387

East Bay Division—Martinez Outpatient Clinic  
 150 Muir Road  
 Martinez, CA 94553  
 925-372-2000 | 800-382-8387

### Call Center

800-382-8387 Mon–Fri 7 a.m.–6 p.m.

### Prescription Refills

Automated Telephone Refill System: 1-866-600-VARX (1-866-600-8279) Toll-Free  
 Available 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays.