

Veteran Updates

News and updates on Veterans issues from the San Francisco VA Health Care System • December 2015

How to Handle Holiday Stress

Holiday stress can be triggered by almost everything--from noisy and crowded shopping, no parking spaces, overspending, entertaining, under-exercising, over-committing, or eating and drinking ourselves into a coma. We get overstressed, and too much stress affects our health. This holiday season, try these tips to help manage stress:

1. Carve some time for yourself.

Listen to your favorite music, take a hot bubble bath, write in a journal, meditate, get a massage, sleep in, try a Tai Chi or Yoga class—anything that can restore your inner calm.

2. Recognize and acknowledge your feelings.

If you can't be with loved ones, or there's been a divorce or death of someone close to you, it's normal to feel sadness and grief. Resist the urge to hide under your goose-down comforter all day, emerging only to inhale an entire platter of reindeer cookies. Reach out to others, volunteer, be with others who can make you laugh and feel good about yourself.

3. Set aside differences.

Practice accepting everyone as they are, even if they don't live up to your expectations.



4. "Bring your Own" situations.

Respect your limits. If you're in recovery from alcohol or other substances, do not consume or bring these items to a party.

5. Take good care of yourself.

Do get enough rest, drink enough water, eat wisely, keep up physical activity, don't over-commit, dress appropriately for the weather, take time to laugh, breathe deeply to de-stress, and surround yourself with positive people.

6. Have the courage to seek professional help.

If you persistently feel sad or anxious, irritable and hopeless, talk with your provider or mental health professional. Professional counselors can help you discover the source of your stress and provide you with useful coping techniques.

7. Where to go for help.

For urgent services, enrolled Veterans in crisis may be seen at the SFVAMC Emergency Department. Veterans may also call the 24/7 Veterans Crisis Line, (800) 273-8255 and press 1.

Breathe. You've got this. Happy holidays!



Did you know the VA leads the country in HIV/AIDS screening, testing, treatment, research and prevention?

Please join us for a special event on **Friday, December 11, from 9:30 - 11:30 a.m.** at San Francisco VA Medical Center in the Auditorium (Bldg. 7, First Floor, Room 112) for displays of Veteran artwork, photography, and poetry; guest speakers; booths; snacks; community resources; door prizes; special presentations, and more!

The Centers for Disease Control recommends that all U.S. adults get tested for HIV infection at least once, and be tested repeatedly if there is an ongoing risk of HIV infection.

Be sure to visit www.hiv.va.gov for the latest information about HIV/AIDS basics, getting tested, treatment, questions to ask your health care provider, living with HIV, tips and tools.

Veterans Crisis Line: Help is a Phone Call Away

If you are a Veteran in crisis, confidential support is only a phone call, click, or text away, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

The Veterans Crisis Line, online chat, and text-messaging service are free to all Veterans, even if you are not registered with the VA or enrolled in VA health care.

Just call (800) 273-8255 and press "1", or send a text to 838255, or chat online at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net.

The Veterans Crisis Line is staffed by caring, qualified VA responders—many of whom are Veterans themselves.

Crisis feels different for everybody and can arise from situations before, during, or after military service. Some Veterans are coping with aging, stress, difficulties in their relationships, transitioning back to employment, or education.

Whatever's got you down, a Veterans Crisis Line responder can provide support, day or night. Make the call. Get the help you've earned.

Recent Changes to the Veterans Choice Program: Now Easier and More Convenient to Participate

The VA recently announced some changes to the Veterans Choice Program to make participation **easier and more convenient** for Veterans who need to use it.

What's New About Eligibility?

Enrolled Veterans are now eligible to use the Choice Program if they:

- Are told by their local VA medical facility a VA appointment can't be scheduled within 30 days of the date the Veteran's doctor determines the Veteran needs to be seen.
- Can't be scheduled for a VA appointment within 30 days of the date the Veteran desires to be seen.
- Need to travel by air, boat, or ferry to the VA medical facility closest to the Veteran's home.
- Face an unusual or excessive burden traveling to a VA medical facility based on geographic challenges, environmental factors, or a medical condition.
- Reside in a state or territory without a full-service VA medical facility.

For complete details and specifics about the newest eligibility rules, visit www.va.gov/opa/choiceact.

How To Use the Choice Program

Veterans seeking to use the Veterans Choice Program (or to replace a lost Choice Card) can call this number:

(866) 606-8198 to confirm their eligibility and to schedule an appointment. When Veterans call, they'll learn if they are eligible, which doctors are participating in their area, and they'll be asked to provide their name, address, date of birth, and last four digits of their social security number.

Why Use the Choice Program?

If you are already enrolled in VA health care, the Choice Program allows you to receive health care within your community instead of waiting for a VA appointment or traveling to a VA facility. Using this program does NOT impact your existing VA health care, or any other VA benefit.

Remember, care in the community is only covered by VA for medical needs which have been approved by your VA physician.

Veteran Kudos

"Again, kindness and professionalism were shown to me by these folks at the VA hospital. They explained everything about the procedure being done to me which made me feel comfortable and at ease. Thanks again for your kindness!" - A.C.V.

