



What's new at the WRIISC?

June 2006

HELLO AGAIN AND WELCOME to the forth edition of "What's new at the WRIISC?." The War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC) is proud to present this newsletter to you quarterly to update you with current information on our program and topics related to veterans' health. If you would like additional information about anything mentioned in our newsletter, or have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us. If you'd like to make suggestions about topics to cover in this news letter in future editions or you would like to be taken off of our mailing list, please let us know. We are on the 11th floor of the East Orange VA Medical Center and our number is 1-800-248-8005. Our website is www.wri.med.va.gov.

WRIISC STAFF VISITS FORT DIX BASE

War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC) Staff members recently visited the United States military base at Fort Dix, NJ. The purpose of this visit was to get a first hand look at what services members experience upon returning to the US after deployment. Our team learned a lot about the process of re-entry and return to civilian life and about what we can do to better meet the needs of our newest veterans. Being surrounded by so many service members who have sacrificed so much for our country was a very emotional experience for all of us. We extend our heartfelt thank you to all those who have served our nation.

SLEEP HYGIENE

One of the concerns we hear from a lot of the veterans who come to our center is about their sleep. You can improve your chances of getting a good night's sleep. Here are a few tips to help you get the sleep you need and deserve.

Have a routine for going to bed. Start to unwind early in the evening, and do the same things each night just before bed, signaling your body to settle down for the night. Go to bed at about the same time each night and wake up about the same time each morning—this will keep your biological clock in check.

Create a restful place to sleep. Don't fall asleep on the couch and don't have the TV or radio on while sleeping. Sleep in a cool, dark room that is free from noises that may disturb your sleep. If you find yourself not falling asleep within a half hour of going to bed, get out of bed and do a quiet activity (like reading). Return to bed when you are ready to sleep.

Don't do things that will keep you up at night. Avoid caffeine late in the day. Don't exercise too close to bedtime. Try not to take a nap during the day, especially in the late afternoon.

WRIISC STAFF: IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Gladstone V. Reid, a Biomedical Engineer in our department, earned a Second Place in the Oral Presentation category of the 32nd NorthEast Bioengineering Conference hosted by Lafayette College in Easton, PA, April 1-2, 2006. He competed with students from up to 36 other schools. He presented his thesis topic, "Virtual Function Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) Pain Study System."



Participating in research helps other veterans. We appreciate your continuing support of our mission to improve the health of veterans through research!

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Because of her incredible accomplishments in both military and civilian life, we will feature Major General (MG) Marianne Mathewson-Chapman in a few of our upcoming newsletters. We will begin sharing her life experiences in the next edition of this newsletter in the "Making a Difference" feature.

MAKING YOUR HEALTHCARE WORK

Getting the most out of visits with your healthcare providers is something we hear a lot about. It is important to plan for and take control of your health and that can begin with your next appointment with your doctor.

Thing to do prior to the visit:

- Write down your symptoms, concerns and questions and try and prioritize them.
- Make notes of the questions you want to ask the doctor.
- Have a current list of ALL medications (prescription and non-prescription).
- Have a list of what other health care providers you have seen and what tests or medications they prescribed to you.
- Make copies of any test results to take with you.

At the visit:

- Let your doctor know you have a plan for the visit.
- Tell your doctor the most important key concerns you want to address.
- Make sure you agree on what you will cover.
- Describe your symptoms or reasons for your primary concerns.
- Ask plenty of questions and make sure you understand the answers.
- Ask about the different ways of handling your health problems and the pros and cons. It is also important to discuss what would happen if nothing is done.
- Ask your doctor where you can find additional information.
- Make sure you summarize the agreed to next steps.

After your visit:

- Ask yourself how the visit went. Did you get your primary concerns addressed?
- Talk to your family about what your provider said and discuss any recommendations.
- Try the agreed-upon treatment or tests.
- Follow up as agreed.
- Write notes after the visit so you do not forget what was covered during the visit and what steps you should take next.



Have a happy summer!

EXERCISE TO HELP MANAGE CHRONIC PAIN OR FATIGUE

If you are one of the millions of Americans who suffer from chronic fatigue or chronic pain, exercise may help you manage your symptoms. When you feel pain or fatigued, it might lead you to an inactive lifestyle. Living an inactive lifestyle may increase your level of fatigue and pain, lead to de-conditioning of the body, make you more prone to injury and put you at risk for other, more severe health problems. Wouldn't it be great to be able to do your daily activities without having to worry so much about the pain or fatigue and still have energy left over for enjoying your recreational activities? Regular physical activity and exercise can help you do that.

Recent research studies with patients that had either chronic fatigue syndrome or fibromyalgia have reported that moderate exercise *decreased* fatigue, pain, distress, and symptoms. At the same time, it *improved* health perceptions, physical function, and aerobic fitness. Some studies have also shown that low-intensity exercise like walking and pool exercises *improved* symptoms and ability to do daily activities. As a result of low intensity exercise, people reported *less* joint and muscle pain.

Exercise has benefits for everyone so make the commitment to yourself to get started in an exercise program. You will feel better, and you will feel better about yourself.

To begin an exercise program, start by just gradually increasing your daily activity. Use any opportunity you have to do some extra walking.

- Park a little bit farther when you go shopping or go to the grocery store.
- Take the stairs whenever you can.
- Get up more often and do some tasks around your home.
- Limit your television watching (as this promotes inactivity).
- Go out with friends more often.
- Join a local club or organization, or take up a hobby.
- Make sure that you contact a doctor and determine your exercise readiness.

SUN SAFETY ACTION TIPS

You can still enjoy the outside weather throughout the summer- just remember to take a few simple precautions to avoid exposure to the sun's harmful UV light.

1. Limit Time in the Midday Sun
2. Seek Shade
3. Wear a Hat
4. Cover Up
5. Always Use Sunscreen
6. Watch for the UV Index