

Veteran Updates

News and updates on Veterans issues from the San Francisco VA Health Care System • August 2017

Preventing Loss of Independence through Exercise

Preventing Loss of Independence through Exercise (PLIÉ) is a unique group movement program for Veterans with Alzheimer’s disease and dementia. This innovative San Francisco VA Medical Center (SFVAMC) program is a way to improve function and quality of life for these Veterans, and it may reduce the rate of falls and delay hospitalization. PLIÉ recently received a “Spark Seed Spread” grant from the VA Innovators Network to help spread this program to other Medical Centers throughout the VA system.

PLIÉ is part of a joint study between SFVAMC and the UCSF Osher Center for Integrative Medicine. Veterans in PLIÉ participate in one-hour group exercise sessions two days a week for twelve to eighteen weeks. These sessions focus on skills that even Veterans with memory loss can accomplish, including:

1) Training ‘muscle memory.’

The body can still learn to perform sequences of movements to support daily function (e.g., sitting, standing and balancing), even when there is no awareness of learning.

2) Mindful body awareness.

Paying attention to breathing and in-the-moment bodily sensations may help orient people with memory loss to the present moment and may help reduce feelings of anxiety about the past or future.



Deborah Barnes, PhD, MPH and Bonnie Graham, Director, SFVAHCS

3) Social connection. As memory declines, in-the-moment social connections with others become increasingly important. Moving as a group, including moving with music, may help increase feelings of well-being.

“The focus is on things people with dementia can still do very well,” says Deborah Barnes, PHD, MPH, Research Health Sciences Specialist at SFVAMC and Principal Investigator for the PLIÉ study. “These Veterans can still learn movement through repetition. They are capable of being ‘in the moment,’ so they’re also able to be socially engaged through these group sessions.”

Dr. Barnes notes that many short-term improvements can already be seen

in Veterans who have participated in PLIÉ – including cognitive benefits, improved motor functioning, and general improvements in health and wellbeing. In the long term, Dr. Barnes and her fellow investigators are hoping to see fewer falls and reduced hospitalizations in Veterans who have completed the program.

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— Deborah Barnes, PhD, MPH

Because of so many wonderful and innovative programs like PLIÉ, SFVAMC is one of the first VA Medical Centers to join the VA Innovators Network. Through this Network, Dr. Barnes was able to secure a “Spark Seed Spread” grant to help spread PLIÉ to other VA Medical Centers. “Coming from the research world, it often takes years and years to see your spread outside of your site,” says Dr. Barnes. “This is a great chance to kick start that process and share the benefits of PLIÉ.” In August 2017, Dr. Barnes and her team had the chance to present their great work with leaders from all over VA – including VA Secretary David Shulkin - at the annual VA Innovation Demo Day in Washington, D.C.

To learn more about PLIÉ, visit www.plie4dementia.com

Million Veteran Program

The Million Veteran Program (MVP): A Partnership with Veterans is a national, voluntary research program conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Research & Development. MVP aims to enroll at least one million participants nationally. Enrollment is currently open to Veterans registered in VA healthcare, with plans for expansion in the future to welcome non-VA users, active duty, and other relevant populations. Over 1,000 Veterans in the San Francisco VA Health Care System have now enrolled in this program.



**MILLION
VETERAN
PROGRAM**

DISCOVERY ★ INNOVATION ★ ADVANCEMENT

By participating in MVP, Veterans will help contribute to the knowledge base that may result in developing personalized treatments for military-related illnesses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as more common illnesses, like diabetes and heart disease. Results from MVP will help improve health care for Veterans and all Americans.

MVP has extensive safeguards in place to keep Veterans personal information secure and confidential. Participation will not affect access to health care or benefits. Visit the website of the Million Veteran Program at www.research.va.gov/mvp to learn more. For more information or to participate, call toll-free 866-441-6075. Additionally, you can stop by Building 200, 2nd Floor, Room 2B-117/118 (Lab Check-In) at the San Francisco VA Medical Center during normal business hours, Monday-Friday to learn more.



Healthy Grilling Tips

Consider these tips for a healthy, delicious grill out:

CHOOSE HEALTHY PROTEINS

Many traditionally grilled meats are high in saturated fat and sodium, such as brats and hot dogs. Instead of using these, look for whole cuts of lean meat and poultry, fish, or choose a plant-based protein such as tofu. Have you ever cooked tofu before? No problem! Choose firm or extra-firm varieties, dry well, and cook over low, indirect heat. To add flavor to your tofu explore with various spices or sauces.

PUT VEGGIES IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Meats are frequently the main dish for meals and are often served in portions that exceed the recommended serving size. Did you know that a serving of meat is typically only three ounces (or about the size of a deck of cards)? Instead of taking a larger portion of meat,

consider filling half your plate with flavorful, grilled vegetables.

Here are a few ideas:

- Zucchini, yellow squash, and eggplant skewers seasoned with lemon juice and Italian seasoning.
- Carrots and parsnips with a sprinkle of brown sugar.
- Asparagus spears brushed with olive oil.

TRY GRILLED FRUIT FOR A SWEET FINISH

Most Americans are not consuming the recommended amount of fruit each day (1.5-2 servings for women and 2-2.5 servings for men). Using whole fruit as the basis of your dessert ensures you are getting the sweetness you desire, in a nutrient-dense food! Good options for grilling are apples with nutmeg or pineapple with a pinch of cinnamon.

Interested in learning about healthier grilled meals or have other nutrition questions? Talk to your VA provider at your next appointment about meeting with a VA dietitian.



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