HealthierUS Veterans
2006-2007 Report

VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (NCP)

In this report, you'll find:

- History of the HealthierUS Veterans Initiative
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HealthierUS Veterans Event Highlight

"Step Up and MOVE for Fitness"

In May 2007, 15 Service Chiefs at the VA Medical Center in Martinsburg, WV, challenged each other and their services to the most steps at the end of 7 days. The Pharmacy Service won with 121,424 steps in 7 days. Second place went to Nutrition and Food Service with 94,246 steps and third was Prosthetics Service with 67,337 steps. The facility's graphics artist designed fun cartoons and bulletin boards to encourage participation.

History of the HealthierUS Veterans Initiative

In February 2006, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) joined forces in an unprecedented effort to improve the health of veterans across the country and launched a new initiative called "HealthierUS Veterans." Based on the Presidential initiative *HealthierUS*, the focus of this initiative is on obesity and diabetes prevention for veterans and their family members. Obesity and diabetes are major health concerns for veterans and the VA health care system, just as they are for the nation as a whole. The message is "Eat Healthy. Be Active. Get Fit for Life."

VA set 3 overall program goals:

1. Integrate the HealthierUS Veterans concept into VA medical center policies and programs for veteran patients and staff.
2. Communicate the HealthierUS Veterans message to the larger population of veterans and family members who don't receive VA health care.
3. Promote partnerships between VA medical centers and community organizations and groups that provide obesity and diabetes prevention programs, especially those supported by HHS.

Components of the HealthierUS Veterans Initiative

The HealthierUS Veterans Initiative has 5 components:

1. Promotion of VA's *MOVE!* Weight Management Program;
2. Prescription for Health;
3. Fitness Challenges;
4. Collaboration between VA medical facilities and HHS community programs, including *Steps to a HealthierUS*; and
5. Fit for Life Veteran Volunteer Corps.

MOVE! is an evidence-based, patient-centered weight management program with a comprehensive focus on behavior, nutrition, and physical activity to help veterans lose weight, keep it off, and improve their health. Veterans and family members can complete an online assessment, the *MOVE!23*, at www.move.va.gov. They will get an individualized report and can print out dozens of handouts with information pertinent to them. They can also print a report for their health care provider to help with counseling about weight control.

The Prescription for Health is a paper prescription for health care providers to give to patients who are overweight or obese to encourage increased physical activity. The prescription allows providers to tell patients their body mass index (BMI) and to help them set physical activity goals for the number of steps to walk a day.

HealthierUS Veterans promotes fitness challenges through the President's Challenge website, developed by HHS

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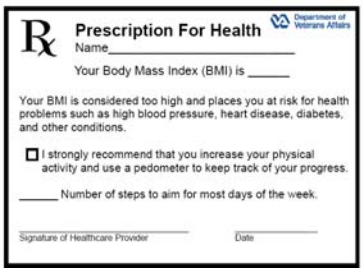
HealthierUS Veterans


Prescription For Health

Department of Veterans Affairs

Name_____

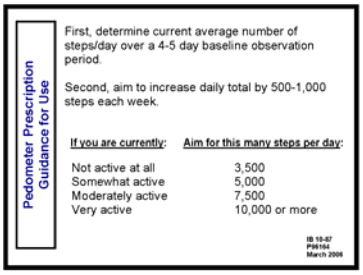
Your Body Mass Index (BMI) is _____

Your BMI is considered too high and places you at risk for health problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and other conditions.

☐ I strongly recommend that you increase your physical activity and use a pedometer to keep track of your progress.

_____ Number of steps to aim for most days of the week.

Signature of Healthcare Provider Date


Pedometer Prescription Guidance for Use

First, determine current average number of steps/day over a 4-5 day baseline observation period.

Second, aim to increase daily total by 500-1,000 steps each week.

If you are currently:	Aim for this many steps per day:
Not active at all	3,500
Somewhat active	5,000
Moderately active	7,500
Very active	10,000 or more

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March 2006

Components of the HealthierUS Veterans Initiative (cont'd)

(Continued from page 1)

(www.presidentschallenge.org). Veterans can participate by registering and logging their fitness activities online, either as individuals or as members of a group.

Forty communities around the country are part of the *Steps to a HealthierUS* program, a campaign to improve nutrition and physical activity and reduce the risk of obesity and diabetes. VA medical facilities in these communities are working together with the *Steps* programs to reach veterans and family members.

The Fit for Life Veteran Volunteer Corps is a volunteer group of veterans, family members and friends, and anyone interested in supporting the HealthierUS Veterans effort. Working through the VA Voluntary Services offices in VA medical facilities, Fit for Life Corps members help to promote HealthierUS Veterans events and activities.

HealthierUS Veterans Washington, DC Event - May 2006

Fitness Expert Denise Austin poses with members of US Marine Corps

HealthierUS Veterans Event Highlight

"FUNky Fridays"

In September 2007, the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System held a series of 3 Friday events called FUNky Fridays. Employees were invited to walk together and to learn about nutrition and healthy living. Refreshments, prizes, and a DJ made the events lively and FUNky!

Timeline of Key HealthierUS Veterans Events and Activities

2006

- February 27: Press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, DC National Press Club in Washington, DC with Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary R. James Nicholson; Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Michael O. Leavitt; former Surgeon General Richard Carmona, MD, MPH, FACS; and former Under Secretary for Health Jonathan Perlin, MD, PhD, MSHA, FACP.
- March 2: Press conference with Secretary Nicholson and Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor of New York City.
- May 6: 50th anniversary celebration of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports at RFK Stadium, Washington, DC, with Dr. Perlin and fitness expert Denise Austin.
- May 13: West Coast regional kick-off event in Seattle with the VA Puget Sound - Seattle Division and Steps to Health King County.
- May 19: East Coast regional kick-off event in Boston with the Boston Steps program and the Boston VA Healthcare System.
- May 10: Memorandum announcing the initiative issued from Under Secretary for Health.
- July 5: exhibit at National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Anchorage, Alaska with Dr. Perlin and Dr. Ken Jones, *MOVE!* Program Manager
- September: Public Service Announcements featuring John Elway and veteran Bill Bloom filmed.
- September 26: VA national kick-off event at VA Central Office, with Secretary Nicholson and staff presentations.
- November 16: VISN 8 Walk and Roll for a HealthierUS event in Bay Pines with the Pinellas County Steps to a HealthierUS program and VHA HealthierUS Veterans lead Dr. Linda Kinsinger.

2007

- April 5: HealthierUS Veterans Celebration of Health event in Denver, with Secretary Nicholson and former Denver Broncos quarterback John Elway, spokesperson for initiative.
- May 16: HealthierUS Veterans activities held nationwide in conjunction with National Employee Health and Fitness Day.
- July 26: HealthierUS Veterans celebration event in New York City, with Secretary Nicholson and VHA Chief Patient Care Services Officer Dr. Madhu Agarwal.
- August: Get Fit for Life exercise DVD filmed featuring Denise Austin and Miss America 2000 Heather French-Henry.
- September 27: VA Symposium on Obesity, Nutrition, and Fitness at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Washington DC, with Secretary Nicholson, Under Secretary for Health Dr. Michael Kussman, John Elway, former baseball star Bob Feller, scientific presentations by VA researchers, and poster presentations by VA staff from across the country.

HealthierUS Veterans Activities

A number of HealthierUS Veterans events were held at VA medical centers during 2006 and 2007. In the first 9 months of 2007, 82 events were recorded in an online tracking system. These events included health fairs, farmers' markets, "walk and roll" events and fitness challenges. In May 2007, many facilities celebrated National Employees Health and Fitness Day by holding HealthierUS Veterans events for staff, patients and visitors.

In November 2006, all VISNs were asked to name a VISN point of contact for the initiative. Regular monthly conference calls with this group began in March 2007. Guests have included a representative of the Steps to a HealthierUS program, a regional counsel discussing partnership agreements with community organizations, and several VISN POCs, talking about their activities and plans.

In 2006 and 2007, a HealthierUS Veterans exhibit was displayed or a presentation given at more than 30 public and professional meetings around the country. These included meetings of several Veterans Service Organizations, the Wheelchair Games, and other meetings of veterans' groups and professional organizations.

HealthierUS Veterans
Boston, MA Event—May 2006

Display Booth

"Eat Healthy, Be Active, and Get Fit for Life"

Communicating About HealthierUS Veterans

A new website was created for the initiative: www.healthierusveterans.va.gov. This website contains information about each of the components, resources for VA medical staff, and many educational resources for veterans about nutrition, physical activity, obesity and diabetes. There have been nearly 50,000 visits to the website, with an average of 178 visits/day and 4 visits per unique visitor. Items have been downloaded from the website more than 24,000 times.

An award-winning public service announcement (PSA) featuring the HealthierUS Veterans initiative spokesman, former Denver Broncos quarterback John Elway, was shown thousands of times on hundreds of television stations across the country in 2007. The PSA highlights Washington, DC, VAMC *MOVE!* patient Bill Bloom, who successfully lost weight and improved his health.

In FY 2007, work began on an exercise DVD for veterans, featuring veterans, VA leaders, and 2 celebrities, fitness expert Denise Austin and former Miss America Heather French Henry. The DVD includes aerobic, strengthening, stretching, and balance exercises and will be released in FY 2008.

Numerous national and local magazine, newspaper, and newsletter articles have been written about the initiative. A column by Secretary Nicholson appeared in the March/April 2006 issue of VAnguard.

HealthierUS Veterans
Washington, DC Event—September 2007

John Elway with US Marines

Plans for HealthierUS Veterans in 2008

The HealthierUS Veterans initiative will continue to promote the message of "Eat Healthy, Be Active, Get Fit for Life" to veterans and their families all across the country. The Get Fit for Life exercise DVD will be released and made available to VA medical facilities for use with veterans. A toolkit of promotional materials is being prepared for distribution to VA medical facilities. Preparation of a VA-branded version of the HHS book *A Healthier You* is underway and will be distributed when ready. In partnership with the Veterans Canteen Service, the HealthierUS Veterans initiative is planning a "Champions' Challenge" to walk or roll 100 miles in 100 days during November 2007 through March 2008. Many other fun events will be sponsored by the initiative, both locally and nationally. Watch for an event coming to your community!

HealthierUS Veterans
New York, NY Event—July 2007

Former VA Secretary Nicholson gets his blood pressure checked

A HealthierUS Veterans Story

A veteran says, "I am 32 years old,...since Feb 1st 2007, I have lost 64 lbs...my blood pressure was high, resting pulse was high, HDL cholesterol was low...I have learned healthy eating habits,...exercising and the importance to 'get up and move,'...On July 14th 2007, I climbed Mt. Marcy, the tallest mountain in NY, 5344 ft, and completed a 22-mile hike in full...gear. I never would have been able to do this without the help of the VA and the MOVE program."

VA and HHS Staff Who Developed the HealthierUS Veterans Initiative

Many thanks to all the VA and HHS staff who have contributed to the development and promotion of the HealthierUS Veterans initiative. Their expertise and input were critically important in this effort. At the national level, lead HHS staff include: Mary Mazanek, Kenneth Moritsugu, Melissa Johnson, Chris Dobday, Sue Yanovski, Peter Savage, and Meredith Terpeluk. Nationally, lead VA staff include: Linda Kinsinger and staff of the National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, Victor Wahby and staff of the Office of Veterans Health Communication, Stephan Fihn, Caryl Kazen, and Laura Balan.

HealthierUS Veterans

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