



Be a part of your health care team

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Providing you with safe, high quality health care, our top priority, is something we can not do without your help. Along with your doctors, nurses, and pharmacists, you are part of your health care team. We encourage you to be an active member of the team by taking the following steps.

First, share your medical history with your team. Illnesses, medical conditions, and operations are all vital information that can affect your health care plan.

Second, give your health care team a list of all medicines and treatments you are taking. Be sure to list those that may be non-VA prescriptions. For more details on what to include, see the article titled, "Protect your health, make a list" in this edition of *Health Beat*.

Third, ask your team questions. Write these questions down so you won't forget them and record the answers when you receive them.

Finally, when medicines are prescribed, talk to your doctor about them. Find out what they are, how to take them, and when to take them. At the pharmacy, make sure the prescription label matches what you and your doctor discussed.

Communication and understanding between patient and the health care team is vital. The more information shared, the better your health care plan will be. Commit today to taking these small steps toward playing a bigger role in your health.

Protect your health, make a list

Keeping your health care providers informed of prescription and over-the-counter medicines you take is crucial to your safety as a patient. This information allows health care providers to detect possible dangerous drug interactions, allergic reactions, and errors before they happen. When you develop your list, make several copies. Keep one for your record, give one to a family member, and give one to each of your health care providers and pharmacists.



When making your list, keep the following guidelines in mind—

1. List any medicine prescribed for you by a health care provider
2. List any over the counter medicines, such as pain relievers, antacids, laxatives, vitamins, eardrops, etc.
3. List dietary supplements such as vitamins or herbs.
4. List any food or beverage that is consumed as a "health supplement."
5. Include dosages and directions for the all of the above.
6. Any allergic reactions you have had to any medication.
7. Keep your list updated.

VA hospitals receives top grade from Harvard

A comprehensive study by Harvard Medical School concludes that federal hospitals, including those run by VA provide the best care available anywhere for some of the most common life-threatening illnesses.

The study was published December 11 in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, a journal for health care professionals. Researchers looked at congestive heart failure, heart attack and pneumonia across the health care industry and found that patients in federal facilities are more likely to receive high-quality care than those in for-profit hospitals.

The study found that hospitals operated by the federal government and the military received higher performance ratings than other hospitals studied.

Is it more than "the blues"?

Depression affects about 19 million Americans but only one in three depressed people get help.

If you have at least five or more of the following symptoms during a two-week period with at least one of the symptoms being either a depressed mood or loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities, then you may have depression.

- Depressed mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities
- Change in appetite or weight
- Change in sleeping patterns
- Speaking and/or moving with unusual speed or slowness
- Decrease in sexual drive
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness, self-reproach or guilt
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate, slowed thinking or indecisiveness
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Nearly eight out of ten patients with depression will improve with treatment. If you are experiencing symptoms of depression, contact your health care provider.