

RETIREE UPDATE 30 July 2015

Women Veterans can get help with their specific health care needs by calling: 1-855-VA-WOMEN (829-6636).

Bothered by the bad breath left after a zesty dinner with **garlic and onion**? For your health's sake, get over it, and enjoy a breath mint after your repast. Despite their arguably unpleasant aroma, these vegetables' nutritional benefits and unique taste make up for their smelly side effect. These vegetables belong to a nutritious group called allium vegetables, with other notable members being leeks, scallions, chives, and shallots. Eating garlic and onion for healing purposes started in ancient Chinese, Indian and Egyptian cultures. While not all health claims have stood the test of time, research has actually proven alliums to be beneficial at improving cardiovascular health and reducing risk of all-site cancers, especially those effecting reproductive and digestive organs. Recently, attention has been given to allium vegetables' role in boosting prostate health, specifically, their potential to reduce the risk of inflammation, benign prostatic hyperplasia (enlarged prostate) and cancer. Complications of these conditions may range from mild yet annoying, such as trouble with urination, to extremes including death. According to the American Cancer Society, in 2015 it is estimated that one in seven men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during their lifetime.

The easiest way to learn about your benefits. #ExploreVA <http://explore.va.gov>

The **Veterans Choice Program** is a new, temporary benefit that allows eligible Veterans to receive health care in their communities rather than waiting for a VA appointment or traveling to a VA facility. While I have sent this out before, it is important enough to remind everyone. Here are the answers to the 10 most important questions:

1: **Am I eligible** for the Choice Program?

You must have been enrolled in VA health care on or before August 1, 2014, or be eligible to enroll as a recently discharged combat Veteran. You must also meet at least one of the following criteria:

- You are told by your local VA medical facility that you will need to wait more than 30 days for an appointment from the date clinically determined by your physician, or, if not such date is provided, our preferred date.
- Your residence is more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA medical facility.
- You need to travel by plane or boat to the VA medical facility closest to your home.
- You face an unusual or excessive burden in traveling to the closest VA medical facility based on geographic challenges, environmental factors, or a medical condition. Staff at your local VA medical facility will work with you to determine if you are eligible for any of these reasons.
- You reside in a State or a United States Territory without a full-service VA medical facility that provides hospital care, emergency services and surgical care, and reside more than 20 miles from such a VA medical facility. Note: This criterion applies to Veterans residing in Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire, Guam, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Also note that some Veterans in New Hampshire reside within 20 miles of White River Junction VAMC.
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2: **What do I do** if I think I am eligible?

Call the Choice Program Call Center at 866-606-8198 to verify your eligibility and set up an appointment.

3: **Can I call my non-VA** doctor to make an appointment?

No, please call the Choice Program call center at 866-606-8198 to verify eligibility and set up an appointment.

4: How is the **40 mile calculation** made?

This calculation is based on the driving distance from your permanent residence (or an active temporary address) to the closest VA facility, including Community-Based Outpatient Clinics and VA Medical Centers.

5: If I am eligible for the Choice Program, **can I receive Beneficiary Travel** for travel to appointments with a Choice provider?

Yes, the Choice Act does provide the ability to pay for travel to the Choice preferred provider for Veterans who are eligible for Beneficiary Travel. However, the Choice Act did not provide any new Beneficiary Travel eligibility.

6: **I didn't get my Choice Card**, what do I do?

You do not need your Choice Card to access the Choice Program. If you didn't receive a Choice Card, simply call 866-606-8198 to find out if you are eligible and to make an appointment.

7: How do I get my **prescription filled** if I use the Choice Program?

The Choice Program non-VA Provider will issue a prescription with up to a 14 day supply of a National Formulary drug. You may have the 14 day supply prescription filled at any non-VA pharmacy of your choosing and may submit a request for reimbursement to VA. For prescriptions needed past 14 days, please follow standard procedures to fill a prescription at the VA pharmacy.

8: If I use the Choice Program, does that **affect my VA health care**?

No, not at all. You do not have to choose between the two—the Choice Program is here to make it easier to access the care you need, close to home. 9: Am I responsible for Medicare, Medicaid or TRICARE cost-shares? No, these plans are not considered Other Health Insurance for purposes of the Choice Program. You will not be billed for any of the cost-shares associated with these plans.

10: What about **VA copayments**? Will they be collected by the community provider?

VA copays will be billed by VA after the appointment. If you currently pay VA copayments you will be subject to the same copayment requirements under the Choice Program. Your VA copay will be determined by VA after the care is provided.

Tens of thousands die each year of flu and pneumonia. CDC recommends a **yearly flu vaccine** for everyone six months of age and older as the first and most important step in protecting against this serious disease. While there are many different flu viruses, the flu vaccine is designed to protect against the three main flu strains that research indicates will cause the most illness during the flu season.

Let's debunk five flu vaccine myths:

- Myth 1: The flu shot can give you the flu.
- Myth 2: The flu is just a bad version of the cold.
- Myth 3: I am healthy, I don't need the vaccine.
- Myth 4: I already had the flu, so I don't need the vaccine.
- Myth 5: The side effects of the flu shot are worse than the flu.

So when it's time, [get your flu shot](#). Flu shots are available for Veterans enrolled in VA health care. Check with your [nearest VA health care facility](#) or call 1-877-222-8387 to confirm supply.

Have you ever picked up a prescription, got home and realized you had a question? Maybe you had a headache but weren't sure how the pain reliever would work with another medication you take? You're not alone.

"Your safety is important to us. Don't be afraid to call and ask your doctor or pharmacist to explain prescription directions again if you didn't understand them the first time," encourages Dr. George Jones, Chief of the Defense Health Agency Pharmacy Division. "And it's always a good idea to write down any additional or special instructions so you don't forget them once you get home."

Your pharmacist should be the first resource you use to answer questions about your drugs. If you are taking an over-the-counter (OTC) medication like acetaminophen (Tylenol®), cough medicines, herbal supplements or aspirin, those drugs can interfere with other medications. Because you purchased these products OTC, there is no record in the pharmacy's computer system to prevent harmful drug interactions. It is important that you tell your pharmacist about taking OTC products when you fill any prescription.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is another good resource. FDA's Division of Drug Information (DDI) will answer almost any drug question and are easy to reach. The DDI responds to an average of 4,432 telephone calls, 1,531 emails and 91 letters with drug questions every month. The top five questions DDI pharmacists receive are:

- What are the possible side effects of my medicine, and where can I find the most current information about the drugs I take?
- How do I report a bad reaction to a medicine or a medication error to FDA?
- Are generic drugs the same as brand name drugs?
- How can I find out when a generic will be available for a medicine I take?
- How do I discard medicine that I no longer need?

Did you know that if you get your prescriptions from [TRICARE Home Delivery](#), you still have access to a pharmacist 24/7? You can get answers to these and other questions by calling Express Scripts, Inc., the contractor who manages the TRICARE prescription benefit at 1-877-363-1303. You can also call the FDA Division of Drug Information at 1-855-543-DRUG (3784).