

FEMALE VETERANS AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Karianne Bilsky, Ph.D. Combat Stress Recovery Clinic, Domestic Violence Coordinator

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) includes physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. It can happen in opposite-sex and same-sex relationships. It includes behaviors like hitting, punching, slapping, forced sexual activity, using threats, humiliation, isolation, or name-calling, stalking, and financial abuse. It is a serious concern and can lead to many problems for those who experience or use IPV.

Every day, nearly three women die from IPV in the United States. Unfortunately, about one in three female veterans experiences IPV. The effects of IPV can include

central nervous system problems, low birth weight for babies whose mothers experienced IPV during pregnancy, increased risk for sexually transmitted diseases, behavioral health concerns, substance abuse, and severe injury or death. IPV can also play a role in unintended pregnancy, poverty, and homelessness.

IPV can also harm children. Boys who witness IPV are more likely to use IPV when they grow up. Often, children who see IPV have more problems with depression, school, focus and anxiety. They may also have problems in relationships and with bullying.

People who experience IPV might decide to stay in the relationship because they are afraid, feel unsupported, need financial or physical assistance, or care about their partner. Staying safe is vital, and the Veterans Health Administration is working to make sure there is regular screening, prevention, and treatment for IPV among veterans. At VA Pittsburgh, you can ask to meet with a provider,

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social worker, or the Domestic Violence Coordinator (DVC) to talk about medical and behavioral health treatment. It is good to plan ahead to try to increase your safety and to know your options,

even if you are not planning to leave the relationship. Social workers or the DVC can help you to take steps to plan for safety and can provide resources to help with your concerns. For more information, you can talk to your VA provider and ask to be referred to a social worker or to Dr. Karianne Bilsky, DVC.

Some other aids are:

- National Domestic Violence Hotline – 1.800.799.SAFE (7233); www.thehotline.org
- National Coalition Against Domestic Violence - www.ncadv.org
- Free safety planning app and assessment tool - www.joinonelove.org

Be aware that web use and phone call histories can be checked by someone who uses IPV. If you need a place to safely use the aids listed above, talk to your VA Pittsburgh provider and ask them to talk to with the DVC.

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System Healthy Women's Center

- Melissa McNeil, MD
Medical Director
- Cecilia Pruszynski, RN
Maternity Care Coordinator
- Kim Krsul, MPA
Program Assistant
- Kay McKinney
Program Support Assistant

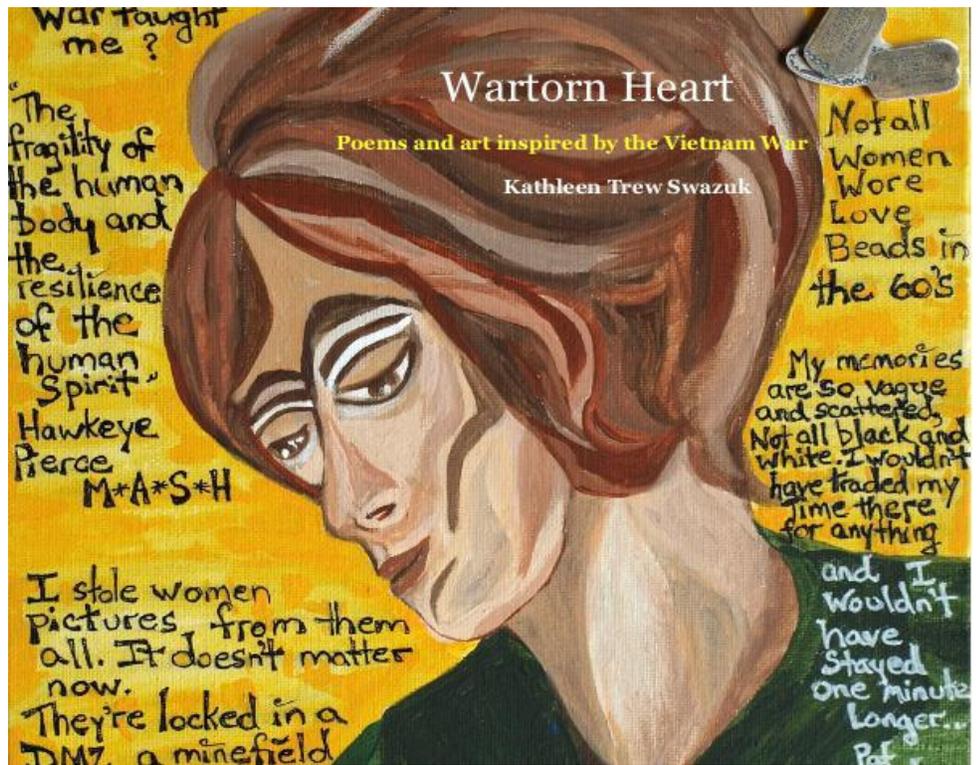
For more information or referrals about services in this newsletter, please contact Kim Krsul at 412-360-3459 or kimberly.krsul@va.gov

VETERAN'S SPOTLIGHT

Kathleen Trew Swazuk—Author of Wartorn Heart

Kathleen Trew Swazuk was 19 and a junior in nursing school when she joined the Army Student Nurse Program. Two years later she was in Vietnam, at the 93rd Evacuation Hospital in Long Binh, seeing and experiencing the horrors of war. She hid the memories and her pain of her time there in the poems in her book, “Wartorn Heart,” which have been lovingly illustrated by artists in a variety of mediums.

Swazuk is a retired nurse practitioner who worked in Primary Care at VA Pittsburgh.



Kathie Swazuk (left) stands by her sister Darlene Trew-Crist, who edited Swazuk's book of poems.

CAN MY MEDICATION PUT ME AT RISK FOR SUNBURN?

Contributed by Beth DeSanzo, PharmD, BCPS

With summer coming, many people look forward to spending time outdoors. With the extra time spent outside our skin will be exposed to more sunlight. *But did you ever stop to think the medication you take may put you at risk for sunburn?*

Many medications can cause “photosensitivity,” which means they can increase the chance your skin could be more sensitive to the sun’s rays and sunburn. The best way to find out if your medication

can cause photosensitivity is to read the medication information handout that comes with your medication, or to ask a pharmacist. Some of the more common medications that can cause photosensitivity are listed below.

- ◆ **Heart and blood pressure medications:** Certain water pills, or diuretics, such as hydrochlorothiazide, chlorthalidone, indapamide, metolazone, furosemide, bumetadine and spironolactone

can cause photosensitivity. Some other blood pressure medications that can cause photosensitivity include amlodipine, nifedipine, diltiazem, captopril, enalapril, and hydralazine and amiodarone.

- ◆ **Antibiotics:** Common antibiotics that can increase your skin’s sensitivity to the sun include ciprofloxacin, levofloxacin, doxycycline, tetracycline, minocycline, metronidazole,

(See Sunburn/Medication on page 7)

SPIRITUAL FITNESS—*Don't just survive, thrive!*

Contributed by Gretchen Hulse, Chaplain

As the seasons change, I would like to encourage you to take some time to contemplate your spiritual health and fitness. Reflect on what you can do better or differently.

You put in time and energy to maintain good physical health. You work out at the gym, eat the right foods, and get plenty of sleep to make sure your body is performing at peak capacity. Keep up the good work in maintaining your physical health.

This year don't neglect your mental, emotional, and spiritual health. You might need to repair some damaged relationships, practice the inner intention of self-compassion, kindness, and forgiveness, and open yourself to deeper healing of the spirit.

How can you improve your spiritual fitness?

You can start by making a concentrated effort in reducing the negative places, people, and things that are draining your energy and putting you in negative moods. Maybe you could commit to watching less violence on TV and the web, gossiping and complaining less, and seeking balance and harmony over chaos.

Life can be difficult. Lifting someone else's spirits can prove to be medicine to your soul as well. Try speaking kind words of encouragement to the people you meet. Slowdown from the rush. We are all busy, but take the time to encourage another person and let them know you care. Show gratitude and generosity instead of greed and ingratitude.

If you want true and lasting spiritual fitness you have to make it an everyday practice. A simple activity to bring calm and peace, like a breathing meditation or prayers, can break the cycle of stress, busyness, and distraction that are so easy to fall into every day.

A daily practice is essential for maintenance, but a more involved weekly practice will bring you depth. Consider gathering with other like-minded folks to practice your spiritual exercises together, to help keep your focus, and provide you feedback.

Volunteering at the hospital, singing in a choir, and participating in a meditation group are examples of weekly practices. Try at least one thing that can break your weekly cycle of commitments and reminds you of what is important.

What are you waiting for?

SPIRITUAL FITNESS GUIDE (SELF-ASSESSMENT)

Spirituality may be used in a general sense to refer to that which gives meaning and purpose in life, or the term may be used more specifically to refer to the practice of a philosophy, religion, or way of living.

FIT	STRESSED	DEPLETED	DRAINED
Potential Indicators	Potential Indicators	Potential Indicators	Potential Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Engaged in life's meaning/purpose ➤ Hopeful about life/future ➤ Makes moral decisions ➤ Able to forgive self and others ➤ Respectful of people of other faiths ➤ Engaged in core values/beliefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Neglecting life's meaning/purpose ➤ Less hopeful about life/future ➤ Makes some poor moral decisions ➤ Difficulty forgiving self or others ➤ Less respectful of people of other faiths ➤ Neglects core values/beliefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Losing a sense of life's meaning/purpose ➤ Holds very little hope about life/future ➤ Makes poor moral decisions routinely ➤ Unable to forgive self or others ➤ Strong disrespect for people of other faiths ➤ Disregards core values/beliefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Claims life has no meaning/purpose ➤ Holds no hope about life/future ➤ Extreme immoral behavior ➤ Forgiveness is not an option ➤ Complete disrespect for people of all faiths ➤ Abandons core values/beliefs

Your chaplain cares about you and can help with your Spiritual Fitness and Post Traumatic Growth.

REPRODUCTIVE LIFE PLANNING

Contributed by: Melissa McNeil, MD, Women's Health Medical Director

Making a Reproductive Life Plan

Thinking about your goals for having or not having children and how to reach these goals is called a **reproductive life plan**. All women of reproductive age need to have a plan—controlling our bodies and our risk of pregnancy is the first step to ensuring both a successful pregnancy outcome AND that other life goals are met. There are many kinds of reproductive life plans. Your plan will depend on your own goals and dreams. First, think about your goals for school, for your job or career, relationships, and other important things in your life. Then, think about how having children fits in with these goals. If you do not want to have children (now or ever) think about how you will prevent pregnancy and what steps you can take to be as healthy as possible. If you do want to have children one day, think about when and under what conditions you want to become pregnant.

We encourage all women to talk to their VA health care provider about what steps to take to prevent pregnancy OR to be as healthy as possible before pregnancy.

The following questions may be helpful in making a reproductive life plan.

If you do NOT want to have children, ask yourself :

1. How do I plan to prevent pregnancy?
2. Am I sure that I or my partner will be able to use the method chosen without any problems?
3. Is it possible that I could change my mind and want to have children one day?
4. What if I become pregnant by accident?

If you DO want to have children some day, ask yourself:

1. How old do I want to be when I start and stop having children?
2. How many children do I want to have?
3. How many years do I want between my children?
4. What method do I plan to use to prevent pregnancy until I'm ready to have children?
5. Am I sure that I or my partner will be able to use the method chosen without any problems?
6. What, if anything, do I want to change about my relationships, home, school, work, finances or other parts of my life to get ready to have children?
7. What, if anything, do I want to change about my health to get ready to have children?
Examples might include medical conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes OR changing medications that I am taking (both prescription and over the counter) that could affect pregnancy.
8. Are there any health conditions or habits I should change before having a baby like obesity, smoking or drinking?



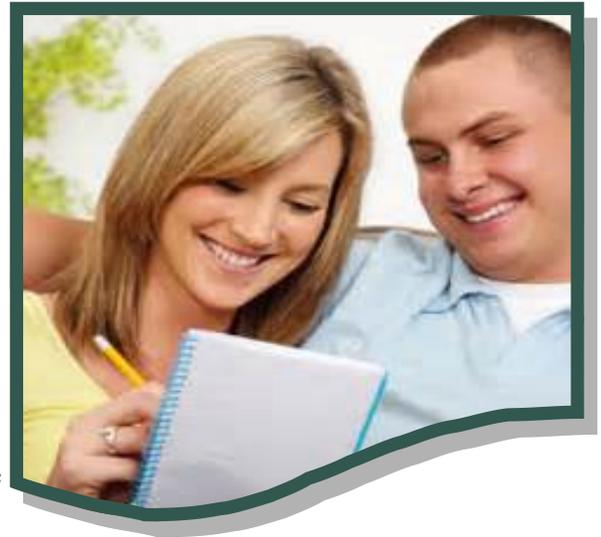
Take Action

Once you have a plan, take action. If you decide to use birth control, talk to your VA health care provider about finding the best method for you and then make sure to use it the right way. If you decide to quit smoking or lose weight, talk to your VA health care provider for help.

Your plan doesn't have to be set in stone. It can change. Life is unpredictable! So make a plan today along with your health care provider and give it some thought each year and expect to make changes along the way.

Examples of situations and plans

- I've decided I don't want to have any children. I will find a good birth control method. Even though I don't want to have children, I will talk to my doctor about how I can be healthier.
- I am in a good relationship, and I'm pretty healthy. I want to stop using birth control and try to get pregnant. I'm going to talk to my doctor to find out what I can do to have a healthy pregnancy.
- I've had two kids in two years. Both times it just happened. I want to have another kid before I turn 36, but I want to wait at least 2 years. I'll talk to my doctor about birth control. This time I'm going to make sure I get pregnant only when I want to.
- My partner and I are ready to have a child, and we need to use a sperm bank or fertility service to get pregnant. I'll make sure I'm in good health and our finances are stable before we start.
- My partner and I are talking about getting pregnant, but I take a lot of medicines for my other health issues. I am going to call my provider to talk about my medicines and health issues. I want to be healthy so I can have a healthy baby!



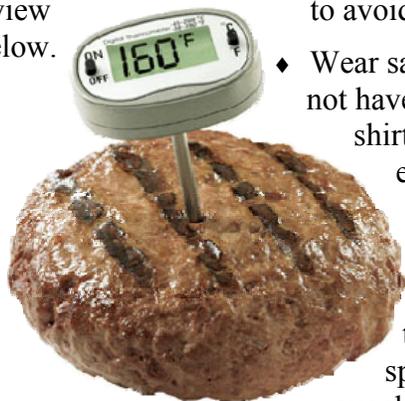
Women's Health Program Director Dr. Melissa McNeil (above, left) briefs at the March 2015 Women's Health Update, which included women's health care providers from VA Pittsburgh's Community Based Outpatient Clinics (above, right) and from other regional VA medical centers. McNeil and her team present health care guidelines for designated VISN4 women's health care providers twice a year, with the next event scheduled for October.

GRILL AND FOOD SAFETY

Contributed by, Lora Werkmeister, Primary Care Registered Dietitian

Before you start up the grill for a barbecue, be sure to review the safety guidelines below.

- ◆ Read the owner's manual!
- ◆ Propane and charcoal barbecue grills should only be used outdoors.
- ◆ Place grill away from the home and deck railings.
- ◆ Use grills only in well-ventilated areas (out from under eaves and overhanging branches).
- ◆ Ensure that children and pets keep a safe distance from the grill area.
- ◆ Check the grill top with care for bristles that may have been left from a grill brush. If bristles are noted, clear them from the grill before heating. Keep in mind other grill cleaning methods
- ◆ Make sure the lit grill is attended by an adult at all times.



- ◆ Use only long-handled tools to avoid burns and splatters.
- ◆ Wear safe clothing that does not have strings, hanging shirt tails, decorations, etc. as these are more likely to catch fire.
- ◆ Keep fire under control by adjusting the controls or spreading the coals evenly.
- ◆ Be ready to extinguish flames with baking soda (for a grease fire) and a fire extinguisher nearby.

Keep it Healthy!

Don't forget about the vegetables! **Mushrooms, corn, bell peppers, zucchini, onions, cabbage, and corn** are stand-outs. You may want to try different vegetables on the grill. There's a simple recipe on page seven.



Food Safety

Make sure all food made on the grill is cooked to a safe inner temperature.

When in doubt, check it out! Use a food thermometer to check the temperature of your food before serving. The guide below highlights safe cooking temperatures for various foods:

References

- National Fire Protection Association
- Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association
- FoodSafety.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Category	Food Examples	Safe, Minimum Internal Temperature
Ground Meat and Meat Mixtures	Hamburgers	160°F
Fresh Beef, Veal, Lamb	Steaks, chops, roasts	145°F
Poultry	Chicken breasts, whole chicken/turkey, wings, drumsticks	165°F
Pork and Ham	Fresh pork and ham	145°F
	Pre-cooked ham (to reheat)	140°F
Leftovers and Casseroles	Leftovers and casseroles	165°F
Seafood	Fin fish	145°F or cook until flesh is opaque and separates easily with a fork
	Shrimp, lobster, crab	Cook until flesh is pearly and opaque
	Clams, oysters, mussels	Cook until shells open during cooking
	Scallops	Cook until flesh is milky white or opaque and firm

Simple Grilled Vegetable Recipe

- ¾ teaspoon canola oil or extra virgin olive oil
- 1 cup washed and sliced vegetables (large slice)
- Black pepper to taste
- Spices to taste (try dried garlic powder, basil, and parsley)
- Aluminum foil

Preheat grill for medium heat. Place vegetables in a medium bowl and add oil. Add black pepper and spices to taste. Toss vegetables until evenly coated. Lay a large piece of aluminum foil flat on table or counter. Carefully pour vegetables onto aluminum foil. Fold foil to cover

vegetables, sealing all sides. Place aluminum packet on hot grill. Using tongs, turn frequently, every 2-3 minutes, so vegetables cook evenly. Grill to desired doneness. Remove packet from grill and enjoy! Remember, contents of aluminum foil packet will be hot.

MEDICATION/SUNBURN

(Continued from page 2)

azithromycin, and sulfamethoxazole/trimethoprim. Medications used to treat fungal infections, like griseofulvin, itraconazole or ketoconazole can also cause photosensitivity.

◆ **Diabetes medications:**

Glyburide, glipizide, and glimepiride are medications used to treat diabetes mellitus, and can all cause photosensitivity.

◆ **Cholesterol medications:**

“Statin” medications, which are used to treat high cholesterol, can make your skin more sensitive to the sun. Atorvastatin, simvastatin, pravastatin, lovastatin, and rosuvastatin are examples of “statin” medications.

◆ **Pain medications:**

Pain medications known as non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) can cause photosensitivity. Several of these, such as ibuprofen or naproxen, can be purchased over the counter. Other NSAIDs, like etodolac, meloxicam, piroxicam, diclofenac, indomethacin, and

celecoxib, require a prescription and cause photosensitivity. Steroid medications like prednisone can also increase your skin’s sensitivity to the sun.

- ◆ **Birth control pills:** Women may be at risk for photosensitivity if they take birth control pills.
- ◆ **Acne medications:** Some skin medications, such as isotretinoin, can increase your chance of having sunburn.

If you take a medication that has not been mentioned in this article, ask your pharmacist if it can cause photosensitivity.

So, what should you do if you take one of these medications?

- ◆ Do not stop taking the medication.
- ◆ Ask your healthcare provider if there is another medication that will treat your condition with a lower chance of causing photosensitivity.
- ◆ Limit the time you spend outside when the sun is more

harmful to your skin, between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

- ◆ When outdoors, wear sun-protective clothing, such as shirts with high collars and long sleeves, pants or a long skirt, socks and shoes, and wide-brimmed hats.
- ◆ Make sure to apply sunscreen with a sun protection factor, or “SPF” of 15 or above to any exposed area of skin.
- ◆ Avoid tanning beds.

Lastly, if you do have a photosensitivity reaction from your medication, contact your healthcare provider or pharmacist for help on how to treat it.



PRIMARY CARE LOCATIONS



University Drive Campus
University Drive
Pittsburgh, PA 15240
Phone: 412-822-3000



H.J. Heinz Campus
1010 Delafield Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15215
Phone: 412-822-3000



Beaver County Community Based Outpatient Clinic
90 Wagner Rd
Monaca, PA 15061
Phone: 724-709-6005



Belmont County Community Based Outpatient Clinic
103 Plaza Dr. Suite A
St. Clairsville, OH 43950
Phone: 740-695-9321



Fayette County Community Based Outpatient Clinic
635 Pittsburgh Road
Uniontown, PA 15401
Phone: 724-439-4990



Washington County Community Based Outpatient Clinic
1500 West Chestnut Street
Washington, PA 15301
Phone: 724-250-7790



Westmoreland County Community Based Outpatient Clinic
5274 Route 30 East, Suite 10
Greensburg, PA 15601

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