

The FORT MILEY MESSENGER



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News from the San Francisco VA Medical Center

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4150 Clement Street, San Francisco, CA 94121

Oral Health Care



Recent surveys show that 90 percent of adults have, on average, 23.5 teeth. Almost a third of adults have all 28 teeth, and 50 percent age 55 and older wear partial or complete dentures. But whether caring for original teeth or dentures, seniors face a range of special oral concerns, including root decay and periodontal disease.

You can keep your smile healthy by following a routine of proper oral care and making regular visits to your dentist. Among other benefits, daily brushing and flossing protect older smiles from two common problems associated with getting older: Root decay, a condition where great amounts of root surfaces are exposed;

and tooth decay, which is caused by the weakening or chipping of older fillings.

Denture Care and Cleaning

Dentures - full or partial - should be brushed daily with a soft toothbrush or denture cleaning brush, using a commercially prepared denture powder or paste, hand soap, or baking soda. Toxic or abrasive household cleaners should never be used. Dentures should be brushed inside and outside, and rinsed with cool water. Remaining natural teeth and gums, especially those teeth supporting a partial denture, should also be brushed. When not in use, dentures should be covered with water or a denture cleaning solution to prevent drying.

Nutrition

At any age, a complete oral health home

program includes sound nutritional habits.

Many of the foods that help your body build strong muscles and bones also help build strong, healthy teeth and gums. Dairy products provide calcium and vitamin D for strengthening teeth and bones. Breads and cereals supply B vitamins for growth and iron for healthy blood, which in turn contributes to healthy gum tissue. Fruits and vegetables containing vitamin C are essential to maintaining healthy gums. Lean meat, fish, poultry and beans provide iron and protein for overall good health, as well as magnesium and zinc for teeth and bones.



Public Affairs Office (00P)
VA Medical Center
4150 Clement Street
San Francisco, CA 94121

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Research News

A study led by Joel Simon, MD, MPH, at the San Francisco VA Medical Center (SFVAMC) has found that low levels of vitamin C are associated with infection by *Helicobacter pylori*, the bacteria that can cause peptic ulcers and stomach cancer.

"This is the largest study to look at the relationship between vitamin C levels and infection by *H. pylori*," said Dr. Simon, who is also the physician advisor to the Wellness Program.

The study was published in the August 1 issue of the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*. Dr. Simon and his collaborators utilized data and blood samples collected from a random sample of nearly 7,000 American adults by the National Center for Health Statistics and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

From the available data, researchers cannot determine whether or not vitamin C might prevent initial infection by *H. pylori*, which often happens during childhood, Dr. Simon said. Neither do the data shed



light on the mechanism for the association between vitamin C and bacterial infection. "We cannot be certain if the infection lowers blood levels of vitamin C or if higher blood levels protect against infection. However, some studies using animal models suggest that adequate vitamin C intake may reduce infection with these bacteria," Dr. Simon said.

Even if it is infection itself that lowers blood levels of vitamin C, Dr. Simon said, it would still be prudent for people who test positive for *H. pylori* infection to increase their intake of vitamin C. "The bottom line is that higher levels of vitamin C may have the potential to prevent peptic ulcers and stomach cancer," he said.

Dr. Simon encourages all Americans to increase their consumption of vitamin C-rich foods because they may help prevent infection with *H. pylori* or mitigate the effects of infection with the bacteria. "Current public health recommendations are to eat five or more servings of fresh fruits and vegetables a day to help prevent heart disease, cancer and other chronic diseases and the data says we're not doing very well in achieving that goal."

Facility Update

The status of projects at the San Francisco VA Medical Center (SFVAMC):

- ◆ **The Facility Master Plan:** The Smith Group is still working on this major project. This complicated and lengthy process will result in a comprehensive Facility Master Plan that will help guide SFVAMC for the future.
- ◆ **The National Historic Preservation status:** We are waiting to hear from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) regarding our application for inclusion on the National Registry of Historic Places.
- ◆ **The Proposed Research Building:** Work on the environmental assessment is underway. NCIRE hired the architect firm of MBT for this project.
- ◆ **The Seismic Upgrade to Building 203:** Building 203 is SFVAMC's inpatient hospital building and, like all hospitals in the Bay Area, must comply with new stringent seismic standards. The design phase is underway for the seismic retrofit of our main hospital building.
- ◆ **The Operating Room Project:** Renovations of two operating room suites were completed earlier this summer. Phase two remodeling is underway on the next three of a total of seven operating rooms. The final phase is expected to begin in March 2004 and will conclude in September 2004.
- ◆ **The Ambulatory Care Project:** We are renovating and reconfiguring our primary care clinics in Building 200 (Clinics Building) through new interior construction. This construction project includes the siting of a contractor's trailer adjacent to the Nursing Home Care Unit. This trailer will be removed by the contractor at the conclusion of the renovation, which will then create 17 new additional parking spaces.

Women are Veterans Too!

As a result of Public Law 102-585, four Women Veterans' Comprehensive Health Centers were established in 1993 to develop new and enhanced programs focusing on the unique health-care needs of women veterans. An additional four centers were funded in 1994. These Centers are located at VA medical centers in: Minnesota, Florida, Northern California (here at the San Francisco VA Medical Center), North Carolina, Illinois, Massachusetts, Southern California, and the Southeast Pennsylvania area. These Centers are structured under a primary care model, and provide a coordinated approach to the provision of medical, surgical, and psychological care for women patients.

The San Francisco VA Medical Center offers a full-service clinic dedicated to women veterans. The Women Veterans Comprehensive Health Center offers evaluation and treatment for acute and chronic general medical problems such as hypertension, diabetes, arthritis, and heart disease. The clinic also offers special expertise in gynecologic procedures, mental health, sexual trauma counseling, social work services, smoking cessation, and VA eligibility and benefits. The SFVAMC Center is one of the nation's leading research centers conducting groundbreaking studies on breast cancer and hormone replacement therapy.



The Fort Miley Messenger is a neighborhood newsletter about the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Medical Center and provides some supplemental health information. Individuals should always consult with their health care provider. For more information, or if you have questions, please contact Ms. Gene Gibson, Public Affairs Officer, at 750-2250 or visit our website at www.sf.med.va.gov.