



DIETETICS

Veterans' Health Week 26 October – 3 November

By OSCAR Care Group Lead Dietitian, Ella Monaghan

Many residents within residential aged care will identify as a veteran having served in conflicts from years gone by or perhaps be a war widow or be related to a veteran.

Each year the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) hosts Veterans' Health Week (VHW) whereby members of the community and ex-service organisations (ESOs) are encouraged to hold events to promote the health and wellbeing of the ex-service community and their families.

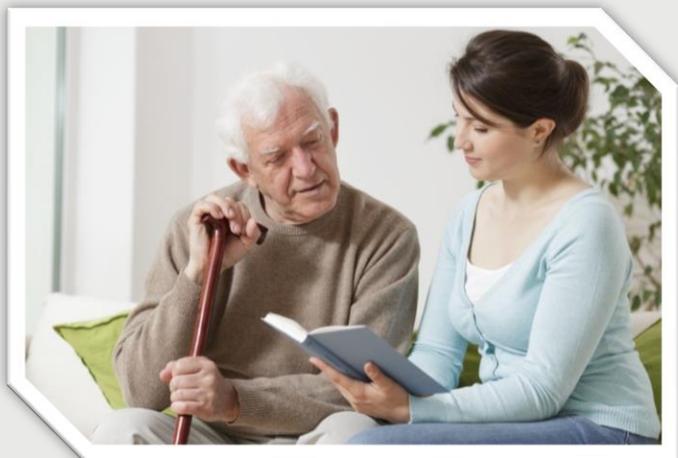
Veterans' Health Week focuses on the following themes each year;

- Nutrition
- Physical Activity
- Social Inclusion
- Mental Wellness



This year VHW will be focused on mental wellness. Mental health is our ability to cope with the stressors of everyday life, your ability to work productively and contribute to your community and realise your own potential.

VHW is a wonderful initiative to celebrate the service of our current and ex-serving military personnel. If you know of a DVA resident within your facility, you may like to sit down with them and ask them about their service or even simply an expression of thanks for their service is a way to honour their sacrifices.



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From my years as a dietitian assisting 'contemporary veterans' from recent conflicts and current serving personnel, I understand that the physical and mental health of the veteran community must be supported, due to the increase in chronic diseases and mental health conditions within this population group.

Ella Monaghan

Ways to improve mental health with nutrition

From a nutrition perspective, there are many ways that we can promote positive mental health through the foods that we eat and how we eat. As the saying goes – you are what you eat!

1. Mindfulness

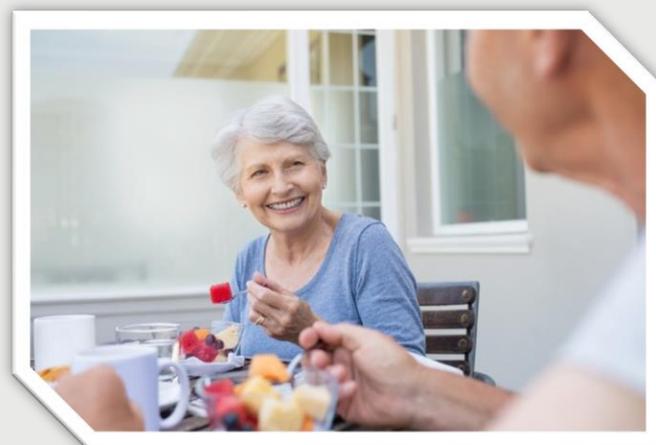
Mindful eating is when you are focusing solely of the food you are eating, making sure to listen to your body's signals of hunger and fullness. Often, we find ourselves eating in response to emotions (e.g. stress/anxiety) or in response to our state of mind such as boredom.

Utilising mindful techniques can help to retrain your brain into listening to your internal and external hunger cues.

Try the following mindfulness techniques:

- **Avoid distractions!** Do not eat in front of the tv or whilst on the phone as this is distracting you from listening to your body's internal cues of hunger and fullness.

- It takes **15 minutes** for the signal to get from your stomach to the brain to tell you that you are full. If we eat too quickly, this does not give your brain a chance to receive the fullness signal.
- Try to stop eating just before you feel full and wait about 15 minutes before eating again and **ask yourself** if you are still hungry.
- Place your **utensils down** in between mouthfuls as this automatically slows your eating down to prevent you from rushing your meal.



3. The five food groups

Eating from the **five food groups** is important as each food group provides our body with vital nutrients. Our body obtains energy from three main sources;

Carbohydrates – this is our brains preferred source of energy as carbohydrates are broken down into glucose (sugar) which the body use quickly and efficiently.

Fats – not all fats are made equal; consuming a diet containing 'healthy fats' such as those found in salmon, tuna, nuts/seeds, avocado and olive oil has been found to be beneficial for brain, heart and eye health.

Protein – our muscles are made up of protein, as we age it is important that we are consuming enough protein as our protein requirements increase due to the breakdown of muscle associated with aging. Protein sources such as meat, poultry, seafood, lentils/legumes, tofu, dairy, nuts and seeds are all wonderful options to incorporate into your diet.

Make sure you are consuming a variety of **coloured fruits and vegetables** too as each colour provides the body with different nutrients. For example, red fruits and vegetables are beneficial for heart health whereas orange or yellow fruits and vegetables are great for maintaining healthy eyes.

How to eat from the five food groups.



3. Limiting alcohol

Make sure to keep your alcohol consumption to within the recommended limits, as alcohol can fill up the stomach and prevent you from consuming a balanced diet which can lead to nutritional deficiencies.

Alcohol is very energy dense, meaning that it contains a high amount of kJ's (calories) which can lead to **excess weight gain** and a range of **chronic diseases**.

Did you know that 2 beers (375mL each) contains nearly the same amount of energy in 6 chicken nuggets!

If you are a healthy adult, the following alcohol guidelines apply;

- You should not consume more than two standard drinks on any day.
- You should not consume more than four standard drinks on a single occasion.

What is a standard drink? Here's a guide.



To participate in a VHW activity in your area – all the details are available here: <https://www.dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing/health-events/veterans-health-week>

References:

1. Department of Veterans' Affairs. Veterans' Health Week. Available from; <https://www.dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing/health-events/veterans-health-week>
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4. Alcohol Think Again. Available from; <https://alcoholthinkagain.com.au/Alcohol-Your-Health/Alcohol-and-Your-Long-Term-Health/Alcohol-and-Nutrition>
5. Food Watch. Kilojoules and fast food – the “in your face” facts. Available from; <https://foodwatch.com.au/blog/in-the-news/item/kilojoules-and-fast-food-the-in-your-face-facts.html>
6. Australian Gov't Department of Health. How much alcohol is safe to drink? Available from; <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/alcohol/about-alcohol/how-much-alcohol-is-safe-to-drink>
7. Australian Government Department of Health. Standard drinks guide. Available from; <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/alcohol/about-alcohol/standard-drinks-guide>
8. Nutrition Australia. Eat a rainbow. Available from; <http://www.nutritionaustralia.org/national/resource/eat-rainbow>



We can help with nutritional recommendations for you or someone you care for. For further information, contact **OSCAR Care Group** Lead Dietitian Ella Monaghan.

