

Spring into Wellness

Veteran Health and Well-Being in Full Bloom

As the chill of winter gives way to warmer days and budding growth, spring naturally inspires renewal — physically, mentally, and emotionally. For veterans across the United States, this season presents a meaningful opportunity to focus on health and wellness.



Mental Health: Facing the Numbers, Finding Support

The mental health challenges veterans face are significant, but so is the progress being made in care and awareness.

- Veterans have a higher rate of mental health conditions than non-veterans, with approximately 30% reporting conditions such as PTSD or depression in the past year.
- Major depressive episodes affect a significant share of veterans, with 11-13% experiencing one in the past year.
- The suicide rate among veterans remains elevated: veterans overall die by suicide at a rate about 1.5x higher than non-veteran adults.

Despite these figures, many veterans do improve with care: roughly 68% of veterans with mental health conditions report symptom improvement with treatment. Springtime—with its longer days and opportunities for connection—is a great reminder that recovery is possible and that seeking help is a strength.



Reconnecting with Purpose

Active involvement—whether through volunteering, community groups, or hobbies—significantly affects well-being. Engaging in social activities, support groups, and peer networks can bolster resilience and provide a sense of purpose. Veterans with robust social support and regular engagement in meaningful activities often report higher life satisfaction and lower stress markers.

Spring is a natural season to restart old routines, form new habits, and celebrate progress — whether it's joining a local fitness class, learning a new skill, or simply reaching out to a fellow veteran.



Physical Health: Moving More, Feeling Better

Physical activity is a cornerstone of wellness — and it's especially powerful for veterans who may be managing chronic conditions or service-related injuries.

- 38% of veterans report sedentary lifestyles, which can affect overall health and quality of life.
- Physical activity has benefits beyond fitness: recent VA research found that veterans engaging in 30 minutes of activity at least five days a week reported about half the rate of suicidal ideation compared with less active peers.

Whether it's walking with a friend, gardening, adaptive sports, or gentle stretching, increasing movement has major payoffs physically and psychologically.



Why Strength Training Matters as You Age

While brisk walking or jogging supports heart health, adding strength and resistance training is just as important for healthy aging. Starting before bone or joint problems develop can help build muscle, strengthen bones, improve balance, and reduce the risk of falls and fractures.

Strength training—such as squats or bench presses—helps maintain muscle mass, boost metabolism, and protect joints. Resistance exercises using bands or light weights can also improve flexibility, balance, and core strength.

As we get older, bone density naturally decreases and muscle mass declines. Regular strength and resistance training helps counter both, supporting independence and making it easier to continue living safely at home. Even 30 minutes of daily exercise can improve balance and lower the risk of injury.

Combining cardio with strength exercises may also help prevent or manage conditions such as heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure.



If you're just getting started, begin slowly and build up gradually. It's also wise to talk with your doctor before starting a new exercise routine, especially if you have existing health conditions. Most importantly, consistency is key to staying strong, healthy, and active.



Take Action this Spring

Here are some wellness checkpoints to mark this season:

- Schedule preventive care: physical exams, dental checks, and vision screenings are vital.
- Set small, achievable goals: even a 10-minute walk can set a positive momentum.
- Connect with others: a call, support group, or shared outdoor activity can lift spirits.
- Talk with a provider: open conversations about pain, mood, or sleep can guide treatment.
- If you're in the Wake Forest Area, join 22 Saves Hockey Foundation for Ageless Movement!
 - FREE program for senior military veterans and/or their spouses.
 - Led by certified fitness professional and nutrition consultant.
 - Holistic approach to wellness that focuses on improving physical, mental, and emotional health through movement and mindfulness practices.
 - Offered weekly Monday mornings from 11am-12pm.
 - For more information, visit [Ageless Movement - 22saveshockey.org](https://www.22saveshockey.org)
 - If you're not able to attend but would like to help support the cause so we can continue to offer this program free of charge, you can donate here: [Donate - 22saveshockey.org](https://www.22saveshockey.org)

If you or a fellow veteran are struggling with thoughts of self-harm or suicide, you can contact the Veterans Crisis Line by **calling or texting 988** and pressing 1. Reaching out is *always* a powerful act of courage.

