

## Exercise and Lung Disease in the Dog Days of Summer

When the weather gets hot, it's hard to get motivated to leave the couch for anything other than a cool drink. However, even if you have a chronic lung condition, such as COPD, asthma, cystic fibrosis, or pulmonary fibrosis, you can benefit from regular exercise. When you exercise, your heart and lungs work harder to supply the additional oxygen needed to make them stronger. As your level of fitness improves, oxygen gets into your bloodstream more efficiently, which may help to reduce shortness of breath. Thirty minutes of moderate exercise five days a week is recommended, but you don't need to join a gym or hire a trainer! Moderate exercises include walking briskly, gardening, riding a bike, swimming, or even vigorous housecleaning. Breathing exercises can strengthen your diaphragm, which helps you to breathe more deeply and effectively. Remember:

- Take slow deep breaths and pace yourself while exercising.
- If you use supplemental oxygen, talk with your provider about adjusting the flow rate during physical activity.
- When air quality is poor, exercise indoors.
- Always talk to your healthcare provider before starting a new exercise program.

### Are you eligible for Lung Cancer Screening?

Knowledge is power! Detecting lung cancer when it's curable by lung cancer screening saves lives. If you or someone you know fits these guidelines, you might be eligible for screening.

- If you:
- Are 50-80 years old
  - Are a smoker or have quit smoking in the last 15 years
  - Have smoked 20 pack-years \*

Talk to your primary care provider to see if lung cancer screening is right for you.

\* Pack year: multiply the number of years you've smoked by the highest number of packs per day you smoked.

### VISN8 Lung Screening Locations

We're here to help! Lung cancer screening is available at these VA locations throughout Florida!

- Miami VA Healthcare System
- James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital
- Bay Pines VA Healthcare System
- Orlando VAMC - Lake Nona
- North Florida/South Georgia Veterans' Health System
- West Palm Beach VAMC
- VA Caribbean Healthcare System

For more information, email us at: [VISN8LPOP@va.gov](mailto:VISN8LPOP@va.gov)

### The VA helps Veterans Quit Smoking

If you're interested in quitting smoking, the VA has several programs to help! To learn more about how the VA helps Veterans quit smoking

Call: **1 (855) QUIT-VET**  
 or go to [smokefree.gov/VET](http://smokefree.gov/VET) to get started

### In This Issue:

#### A Breath of Fresh Air

It's Pride Month. Let's talk about the increased incidence of smoking rates and lung disease in the LGBTQ+ population and how Pulmonary Function Tests (PFT's) can help diagnose your shortness of breath.

#### In the Spotlight

Interview with Bill Watts about the effects of toxic exposures after serving with the First Cavalry Division during Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and Desert Calm.

#### A Call to Service

"The Hill We Climb": Celebrating Juneteenth with an inspirational poem by Amanda Gorman.

## A Breath of Fresh Air

### Pulmonary Function Testing for Respiratory Disease

Now, let's talk about breathing. Shortness of breath can have many causes, and the primary tool for evaluating it is the Pulmonary Function Test (PFT). PFTs help us understand different aspects of lung function. Spirometry measures how much air you can inhale and exhale. Ideally, you should be able to exhale at least 70% of your breath in the first second. If it takes longer, it indicates airflow obstruction, a key feature of asthma and COPD. These conditions are typically managed with inhaled medications that help open up the airways and reduce inflammation.

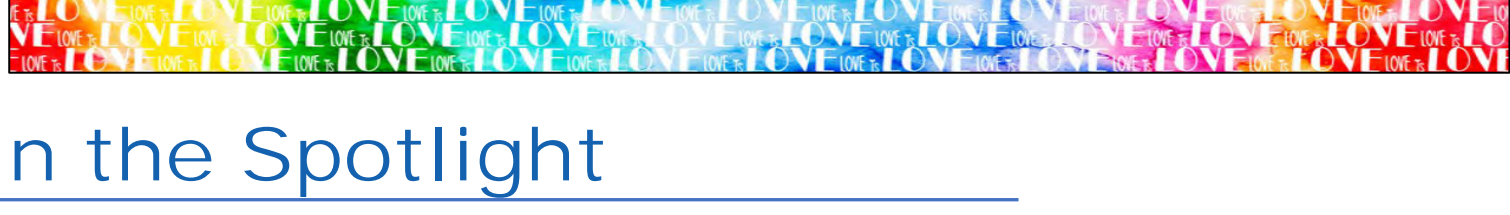
PFTs also assess lung volumes, telling us about the size of your lungs, including the air reserved for extra breathing capacity during exercise. Reduced lung volume is common in conditions like lung fibrosis, certain infections, acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), or after lung surgery. Thankfully, our lungs have built-in redundancy, meaning even with one good lung, many people remain symptom-free. Diffusing capacity measures how well your lungs absorb oxygen and expel carbon dioxide. Conditions like COPD, lung fibrosis, and long-standing, poorly managed asthma can reduce this efficiency. In advanced stages, supplemental oxygen might be necessary.

Clinicians use PFTs not just for diagnosis but also to monitor disease progression or check for medication side effects. Surgeons rely on PFTs to ensure patients have the lung capacity needed for surgery. This comprehensive test usually takes about an hour and provides invaluable insights into your respiratory health.

Veterans, remember that understanding and monitoring your lung health is crucial. Use the benefits you've earned and take proactive steps in managing your health. As always, quality of life begins with quality of care.

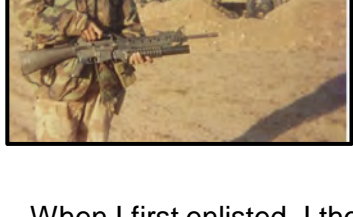
## June is Pride Month!

**Pride Month** is a time to celebrate and promote respect for our LGBTQ+ veterans and all LGBTQ+ individuals, ensuring everyone can live without fear. Unfortunately, LGBTQ+ individuals are often targeted by tobacco companies, leading to a higher rate of smoking and respiratory diseases like Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). Interviews with 23 LGBTQ organizations revealed that smoking is often used as a "socialization aid and a coping technique for stress from conflicting identities." To support liberty and justice for all, we must provide culturally competent care to everyone, including our LGBTQ+ patients and colleagues, and offer targeted education on tobacco and nicotine cessation.



## In the Spotlight

### Bill Watts: A Journey of Resilience



**Bill Watts:** "Hello, my name is William "Bill" Watts, and this is my story of dealing with the effects of toxic exposures, later identified as reactive airway dysfunction (RADS). I served with the First Cavalry Division during all three campaigns of the 90-91 Gulf War—Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and Desert Calm. Being in an Air Defense Artillery unit, we were among the first deployed in the desert, providing coverage for the division. During this time, I was exposed to numerous sandstorms, dust, particulate matter, and later learned, sarin gas and other toxins.

When I first enlisted, I thought I was starting a lifelong career with the United States Army. I was in excellent health, running up to 30 miles per week, and excelling in my duties. I was a trainer, soldier of the quarter, NCO of the quarter, and competed in sports at the division level. However, I began noticing health issues: unexplained weight gain, chronic pain, memory issues, and breathing problems. Military doctors couldn't identify the cause, and there was no significant research on Gulf War veterans at that time. Ultimately, the Army had no choice but to remove me from service, ending what I thought would be a rewarding career.

As time passed, my health issues worsened, particularly my breathing. For six years, I silently suffered as my health declined. My quality of life was so poor that I feared I might not wake up each day. It was time to act. I started visiting the Miami VA, closely monitoring my health with my Primary Care Provider (PCP) and participating in research. I became an advocate for better quality of life for veterans.

In 2020, I met Dr. Gregory Holt through a lung health awareness event hosted by the LPOP VISN 8 manager. Dr. Holt listened to my issues and recommended a battery of tests."

**Dr. Gregory Holt, Pulmonary Specialist:** "I met Bill in 2020 during the pandemic. His story was classic for reactive airways dysfunction syndrome (RADS), an asthma-like condition triggered by a significant exposure to respiratory irritants. Patients with RADS can pinpoint the event that caused their breathing problems. RADS is treated with standard asthma medications, and Pulmonary Function Tests including a methacholine challenge test are useful for diagnosis. Bill underwent these tests, confirming RADS, and we started him on an asthma inhaler."

**Bill Watts:** "Although I may no longer be the athlete I once was, I can now breathe much more comfortably. Many veterans haven't prioritized their health. Meeting the folks at LPOP and participating in lung screenings improved my quality of life. Veterans should use the benefits they've earned and take care of their health. As I always say, quality of life begins with quality of care."

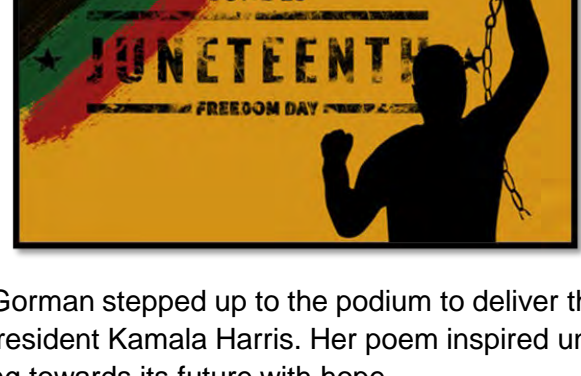


## A Call to Service

"We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." — Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

### JUNETEENTH

On June 19, 1865, in Galveston, Texas, the last remaining enslaved people in the U.S. learned that the Civil War had ended, and they had been liberated by the federal orders in President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth commemorates the anniversary of this critical event with celebrations honoring Black resilience, resistance, freedom, and joy. Juneteenth affords an opportunity for all of us to increase our understanding of our country's history, show compassion and empathy for our Black fellow citizens, and advocate for racial justice to open the door to liberty and a more just future for all Americans.



On January 20, 2021, Amanda Gorman stepped up to the podium to deliver the reading at the inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. Her poem inspired unity and justice by acknowledging both our nation's past and looking towards its future with hope.

#### "The Hill We Climb" by Amanda Gorman

"When day comes we ask ourselves, 'where have we found light in this never-ending shade,' the loss we carry, and the sea we must wade? We've braved the belly of the beast. We've learned that quiet isn't always peace, and the norms, a sea and notions of what just is isn't always just-ice. And yet the dawn is ours before we knew it, somehow we do it.

Somehow we've weathered and witnessed a nation that isn't broken but simply unfinished. We, the successors of a country and a time where a skinny Black girl descended from slaves and raised by a single mother can dream of becoming president only to find herself reciting for one. And yes, we are far from polished, far from pristine, but that doesn't mean we are striving to form a union that is perfect. We are striving to forge a union with purpose, to compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters, and conditions of man.

And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us but what stands before us. We close the divide because we know, to put our future first, we must first put our differences aside. We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another. We seek harm to none and harmony for all. Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true: That even as we grieved, we grew; that even as we hurt, we hoped; that even as we tired, we tried; that we'll forever be tied together, victorious, not because we will never again know defeat but because we will never again sow division. Scripture tells us to envision that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree and no one shall make them afraid.

If we're to live up to our own time then victory won't lie in the blade but in all the bridges we've made. That is the promise to glade, the hill we climb if only we dare it, because being American is more than a pride we inherit — it's the past we step into and how we repair it.

We've seen a force that would shatter our nation rather than share it would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy. And this effort very nearly succeeded. But while democracy can be periodically delayed, it can never be permanently defeated. In this truth, in this faith we trust, for while we have our eyes on the future, history has its eyes on us.

This is the era of just redemption we authored at its inception. We did not feel prepared to be the heirs of such a terrifying hour but within it we found the power to fear a new chapter, to offer hope and laughter to ourselves. So while once we asked, 'how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe,' now we assert, 'how could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?' We will not march back to what was but move to what shall be: a country that is bruised but whole, benevolent but bold, fierce and free. We will not be turned around or interrupted by intimidation because we know our inaction and inertia will be the inheritance of the next generation. Our blunders become their burdens. But one thing is certain: If we merge mercy with might, and might with right, then love becomes our legacy and change our children's birthright.

So let us leave this wounded world better than the one we were left with. Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest, we will raise this bound country into a wondrous one. We will rise from the gold-limned hills of the west, we will rise from the windswept northeast where our forefathers first realized revolution, we will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the midwestern states, we will rise from the sunbaked south. We will rebuild, reconcile, and recover in every known nook of our nation and every corner called our country, our people diverse and beautiful will emerge, battered and beautiful. When day comes we step out of the shade, aflame and unafraid. The new dawn blooms as we free it. For there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it, if only we're brave enough to be it."

### June Calendar

- June 2: National Cancer Survivor's Day
- June 6: 80th D-Day Anniversary
- June 8: World Ocean Day
- June 11: National Call Your Doctor Day
- June 12: National Women Veterans Day
- June 14: Flag Day, U.S. Army Birthday, World Blood Donor Day
- June 16: Father's Day
- June 19: Juneteenth
- June 27: National HIV Testing Day

### Monthly Observances

- LGBTQ+ Pride Month
- Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month
- National PTSD Awareness Month
- National Safety Month
- International Men's Health Education and Awareness Month

### We want to hear from you!

The best newsletters serve the reader's needs by providing useful information that matters. Therefore, tell us what you want to hear. Education: we have experts from every treatment specialty that cares for lung health ready to answer any question or explain anything that's confusing. Human Interest: we want to hear about your experiences. How have you fought the good fight against lung cancer. What do you know now about breathing that you wish you knew before. Memorials: Want to memorialize someone special who's life was affected by lung cancer.

Q&A: Have a burning question that you need an answer to?  
[Email us at VISN8LPOP@va.gov](mailto:VISN8LPOP@va.gov)

## Breathe e-newsletter Editors

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