

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder - A Sign of Our Times



Returning combat veterans are especially vulnerable to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

What is PTSD?

It is estimated that 5.2 million Americans suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) each year. PTSD is a real illness that people may experience after living through a dangerous or scary event. Not everyone who goes through a trauma will develop PTSD.

Symptoms of PTSD

People with PTSD may:

- Relive the event via flashbacks, intrusive thoughts and nightmares
- Avoid places and conversations that remind them of the event
- Have an exaggerated startle response
- Be unable to trust others
- Exhibit irritability, anger outbursts and rage
- Have muscle tension, stomach problems, headaches and other physical complaints
- Have survivor guilt
- Feel numb
- Feel keyed up
- Have difficulty sleeping
- Isolate themselves

Onset & Duration

Most people experience physical and emotional symptoms after a traumatic event. To be diagnosed with PTSD, symptoms must last more than 1 month and interfere with normal functioning. Usually PTSD starts within 3 months of the event. For some, PTSD symptoms don't show up until years later. Some people get better within six months, while others may have symptoms for much longer.

Common Triggers:

PTSD can occur after being:

- A victim of violent crime or terrorism
- In an airplane or car crash
- In a hurricane, fire or tornado
- In a war
- In a life-threatening situation
- A witness to violence or disaster.
- Raped or sexually abused
- Hit or harmed by a family member.

An anniversary date can also trigger PTSD.

Combat and PTSD: The War Continues at Home

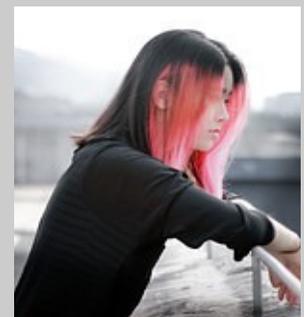
It is estimated that 10-18% of our current military personnel will experience PTSD some time after returning home. Risk of developing PTSD is increased by:

- Intensity and length of the trauma
- Someone close dying/being injured
- Proximity to the event
- Strength of reaction to the event
- The perception of control over the event
- The amount of help received after the event.

Other factors increase the likelihood of PTSD in returning war veterans:

- Longer deployment time
- More severe combat exposure, such as deployment to more "forward" areas near the enemy
- Seeing others injured or killed
- Severe physical injury
- Traumatic brain injury
- Family problems
- Prior trauma

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Combat and PTSD (continued from page 1)

Many returning military personnel do not seek the help they need for a variety of reasons. The most common reason—they do not want others to see them as weak. Other concerns: being treated differently, potential impact on their careers (both military and civilian), others losing confidence in them, privacy, effectiveness of treatments, and possible side effects of treatments. Access to appropriate services is also an issue for many veterans.

AREA RESOURCES for PTSD

General Counseling

Family Counseling Service	630/844-2662
TriCity Family Services	630/232-1070
Gateway Foundation	630/966-7400
AID	630/859-1291
Ecker Center	847/695-0484

Veteran Services

DuPage County Vet Center	630/585-1853
Hines VA Hospital	708/202-8387

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PTSD Treatment Options



Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a treatable condition that responds well to medicine and therapy. Therapeutic approaches that have been used successfully with people with PTSD include:

- Cognitive-behavioral therapy
- Group therapy

- **Exposure therapy**, in which the person gradually and repeatedly re-lives the frightening experience under controlled conditions to help him or her work through the trauma
- **Art therapy**
- **Play therapy** (for children).

Studies have found that selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and other **antidepressants**, can help relieve the symptoms of PTSD.

Other research shows that giving people an opportunity to talk about their experiences very soon after a catastrophic event may reduce some of the symptoms of PTSD.

Depression, anxiety, alcohol or other substance abuse may co-occur with PTSD. These conditions must be accurately diagnosed and treated as part of the overall PTSD intervention.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in Children

While children may exhibit many of the general PTSD characteristics, they may also:

- Worry about being alone or sleeping alone
- Have difficulty separating from a parent or loved one
- Be afraid of situations similar to the event (e.g. high winds, flying)
- Talk a lot about the event
- Complain frequently of physical illness such as headaches and stomachaches
- Have poor concentration
- Have difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Be more irritable than usual
- Develop an eating problem
- Exhibit regressive behavior (thumb sucking, bed wetting)

