



WOUNDED WARRIOR REGIMENT

Fact Sheet | PTSD

What is Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is generally considered to be a severe prolonged reaction to traumatic stress. People who experience a traumatic event may experience symptoms of anxiety or depression that naturally decrease over time, but in most cases they do not develop PTSD. People with PTSD however get “stuck” in their recovery and cannot function as well as they did before the traumatic event. The uncomfortable symptoms of PTSD usually appear within three months after the traumatic experience but sometimes occur months or even years later.

WWR Fact Sheets of interest:

- Medical Cell
- Care Team
- TBI

PTSD Causes

There are many causes for PTSD. A person is at risk of PTSD if they survived a trauma, violence, or abuse. It can also be caused by experiencing a loss such as a loved one, or even a loss in trust of the world or faith in humanity—which is called “moral insult.” Some people develop PTSD when they think their lives are threatened—either suddenly by an unexpected event such a car accident or combat experience, or even when facing death because of a terminal illness.

PTSD Symptoms

To be diagnosed with PTSD, medical professionals look for the existence of certain symptoms present for at least a month. These symptoms fall into four general categories:

Re-experiencing: These are the symptoms most often noticed with PTSD.

- Frequent and disturbing memories of the stressful event
- Flashbacks, hallucinations, or other vivid feelings of the event happening again
- Nightmares (nightmares and flashbacks are felt in the body and are very different than thinking about the trauma)
- Extreme mental and/or physical discomfort when certain things, such as thoughts, feelings, smells, activities, places, or people that remind them of the traumatic event

Overstimulation: These are the symptoms that most often bring people into treatment.

- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Difficulty concentrating
- Being always on alert, watchful, and “on guard”
- Having difficulty relaxing, being always “on edge,” and easily startled

Avoidance: These are the symptoms that maintain PTSD.

- Persistently avoiding things, such as thoughts, feelings, etc., that remind them of the event
- Inability to remember certain details of the trauma
- Staying overly busy, often with work, to avoid thinking about the trauma
- Adrenaline seeking behaviors such as violent video games, speeding, or reckless or self-destructive behavior
- Substance abuse

Persistent Depressed Mood: These symptoms look like depression.

- Negative perspective about self, others, or the world as a whole
- Social withdrawal, feeling detached from others, and/or believing that others cannot understand or will judge and reject them
- Feeling emotionally numb
- Feelings of hopelessness about the future or feeling they have no future
- Constant feeling of horror, anger, shame and guilt
- Distorted perception: blaming self or others
- Decreased interest in formerly important activities
- Irritability or outbursts of anger

Overview of Recovery for Caregivers



Recovery



Stressors



Support

Recovery

It is important to remember that PTSD can be treated successfully. Although your loved one may be a changed person due to the experience, they can recover from the symptoms of PTSD and regain quality of life. However, the best treatment and expected timeline is different for every person.

The most important and only proven effective treatment for PTSD is psychotherapy (talk-therapy). There are many types available; depending on the cause of the PTSD, certain types of talk-therapy are more effective. It is often beneficial to engage in more than one type. Medications can sometimes help with the uncomfortable symptoms of PTSD; however, medications do not treat the issue and could cause a delay if recovery does not include necessary therapy. Certain high risk prescription medications, such as pain killers and anxiety medications, can also delay recovery. Alternatives to medications that have shown benefit include mindfulness, stress relieving, or body-awareness exercises, as well as family and peer support groups.

To learn more about evidence-based treatment therapies and medication aid options review this helpful link:

http://www.dcoe.mil/PsychologicalHealth/PTSD_Treatment_Options

Stressors

To prevent experiencing the uncomfortable feelings of PTSD, people may avoid seeking medical care—especially therapy because it causes them to experience uncomfortable memories. Some may also avoid spending time with family and friends or even avoid themselves with distracting behaviors. For these reasons, people with PTSD are more at risk for self-treating with things like alcohol, drugs, high adrenaline behaviors, and addictive prescription medications. These behaviors cause delay in recovery. Additionally, many with PTSD have other medical conditions, such as other mental health diagnoses, traumatic brain injury, chronic pain, or substance abuse disorder, that complicate PTSD recovery.

A person's environment may also delay recovery; inadequate access to medical care, a lack of family or peer support, financial difficulties, and life situations that increase stress levels such as moving, new jobs, or family changes could all impact recovery. Those with PTSD often have a more difficult time adjusting to increases in normal life stressors, which have the potential to cause PTSD symptoms to increase or return after successful treatment.

Support

How do you support your loved one with PTSD?

Supporting a loved one struggling with PTSD is best done through focusing on recovery. It helps to become educated on PTSD and be able to recognize the signs of an increase in symptoms. Participating in support groups for your loved one as well as yourself also helps. In some cases, caregivers also need therapy to provide an outlet and gain helpful feedback on maintaining a healthy relationship. Encourage the care for your loved one that has shown to improve recovery and be aware of behaviors that will prolong recovery.

Consider the whole person:

Learn about the other diagnoses your loved one may have that could complicate symptoms, behaviors, and recovery. Also, aim to maintain your current role as spouse, friend, and advocate without assuming the role as medical provider-to-patient or parent-to-child. Promote independence and proactive self-care so that your loved one is able to take responsibility for their own recovery.