

Iraq Veterans Against the War

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD Fact Sheet

What Is Post traumatic Stress Disorder?

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD, has been long associated with war veterans. It was called “Shell Shock” in WWI, “Combat Neurosis” during WW II, and eventually recognized as an anxiety disorder by the American Psychiatric Association and termed PTSD. PTSD usually sets in up to several months after the most recent trauma, and can last years or even a lifetime.

What Causes PTSD?

As the name implies, PTSD is caused by trauma. During war, taking part in and/or witnessing the brutal and violent acts of battle. However, PTSD can also be brought on by non-combat acts of brutality or violence toward combatants or civilians. There are many PTSD vets who have never been aggressive towards others, but who may suffer feelings of profound guilt by mere association with such acts of violence. In any case, PTSD is clearly triggered by violence in warfare.

What are the Signs and Symptoms of PTSD?

Re-experiencing traumatic events (obsessive recollections, flashbacks or intrusive thoughts, nightmares), avoidant symptoms (fear of being with people), signs of hyper arousal (easily startled, irritable), avoiding experiences or people that trigger memories of such event(s), increased arousal, to include nervousness, over-reaction to sudden noises, difficulty sleeping (night sweats), and nightmares, bouts of rage and/or depression, difficulty relating emotionally to others, feelings of extreme alienation and meaninglessness, isolation from others, in extreme cases, persistent thoughts of murder and-or suicide. Symptoms can take months or even years to develop.

What Do I Do If I Think I Have PTSD?

PTSD is difficult to recognize, because soldiers are socialized to believe that admitting to feeling bad is weak and that seeking professional help is often viewed negatively and discouraged by the Chain of Command. The best thing you can do is get yourself the care you deserve and improve your quality of life even if there is “peer pressure” not to. Seek out help from a trained mental health professional. You can do this on your installation or through the VA if you are not on active duty. If you are diagnosed, you should immediately call 1-800-827-1000, and ask to be connected to the Veterans Administration Regional Office. Once connected, ask for instructions on how to apply for services related to PTSD. Do NOT take no for an answer. Depending on the VA facility, or individual VA employee, you may be discouraged from filing a claim. Even if they tell you that you are not entitled, demand the application paperwork and file it.

What Is The Treatment For PTSD?

Treatment for PTSD involves therapy and sometimes medication. Medication should be a supplement to therapy, not the primary mode of care. In addition to talking to a therapist, you may also have Vets4Vets, a veterans support group near you, www.vets4vets.us.

Resources:

National Gulf War Resource Center, www.ngwrc.org

National Center for PTSD, www.ncptsd.va.gov