

## WHAT CAN I DO?

### Helping a friend or relative with PTSD

Maybe you have a friend or relative that has been in combat. What can you do to help them?

Help find the right doctor that can diagnose your friend's problem. Once it is determined that they have PTSD, encourage them to stay in treatment and follow the program. Here are some other things you can do to help a friend or relative:

- Try to learn as much as you can about PTSD so you can better understand what they are going through.
- Talk to them, but more importantly, be a good listener.
- Offer encouragement and emotional support.
- Ask them to join you in doing activities that will be a positive distraction for them, like riding a bike, walking or going to the movies.
- Remember to remind your friend or relative that things will get better with time.

Most importantly, if the person you know that is diagnosed with PTSD ever makes comments that make you think they may harm themselves, report it to their doctor or therapist. Talk to your friend about suicide and let them know that it's not the answer.

## SUICIDE

### Never the Answer!

PTSD is the leading cause of suicide among military personnel. It's hard to believe, but military-related suicides have claimed more lives than the actual war in Afghanistan. Although veterans make up a large portion of overall suicides, active personnel aged 19 - 29 are committing suicide at an alarming rate. In 2009, the armed forces attributed 334 deaths to self-inflicted wounds, compared to the 319 casualties suffered by insurgents. If you or someone you know is considering suicide, there is help available.

<http://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov/health>

<http://www.behavioralhealth.army.mil/>

<http://www.armyg1.army.mil/hr/suicide/>

Or call them directly:

Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

## HEALTHY WAYS TO COPE WITH PTSD

- Talk to a health professional. Although results may not be immediate, most people do benefit from therapy and medications, but it takes time.
- Stay healthy. Maintain a balanced diet, stay rested and exercise.
- Don't self-medicate. Although it may seem like a quick way to cope, turning to drugs and alcohol will only make things worse.
- Talk about it with someone you trust. Stay in touch with your family, friends and faith leaders.
- Talk to a support group. There are many support groups geared towards individuals struggling with PTSD. Ask your health care professional for help finding one.
- Break the cycle. When you feel a flashback coming on or are starting to feel anxious try to do something to keep your mind elsewhere. Start a new hobby or do something you used to enjoy.

# PTSD & MILITARY



STAY SAFE SERIES

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## OUT OF THE DARKNESS



## WHAT IS PTSD?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that develops following a traumatic experience such as serious accidents, natural disasters, physical or sexual assault or military combat. Records of PTSD exist from many years ago but only in the 1980's was it recognized as a distinct disorder.

Soldiers may show signs of PTSD after experiencing or witnessing an event that involved near death or serious injury. Some examples are being captured, wounded, day to day combat, being shot at, witnessing a fellow soldier lose their life, or killing others in combat.

## WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

### Signs & Symptoms

PTSD symptoms can begin right after a traumatic experience, but the disorder is not diagnosed unless the symptoms have lasted for at least one month. There are three different types of symptoms that those suffering with PTSD can experience:

1. **Re-experiencing Symptoms**- These symptoms involve reliving the traumatic event. These memories can sometimes feel so real, as if the event is happening all over again. These symptoms cause intense feelings of fear, helplessness and horror and include reoccurring flash backs or nightmares and intense reactions to triggers that symbolize or resemble the event.
2. **Avoidance Symptoms**- These symptoms occur when the person is trying to avoid the traumatic event. They avoid situations that trigger memories. This may involve not going near places where the trauma occurred or avoiding sights, sounds or people that remind them of the event. These symptoms include feeling emotionally numb, strong guilt or depression and can cause a person to change his or her everyday routine.
3. **Hyperarousal Symptoms**- Instead of being triggered by something, these symptoms are constant. Increased arousal can cause those suffering from PTSD to be easily startled, irritable and have difficulty concentrating. Someone suffering from Hyperarousal symptoms may find that they are constantly on the lookout for danger. These symptoms make it difficult to do everyday tasks, such as sleeping and eating.

## DAZED AND CONFUSED

### PTSD's Effects

PTSD is very complicated and can begin at any time. These symptoms can lead to other conditions including:

- Unemployment
- Alienation from friends and loved ones
- Homelessness
- Violence
- Depression
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Suicide



## NO QUICK FIXES

### PTSD and Drug/Alcohol Abuse

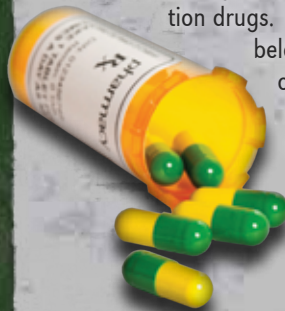
Alcohol and drug abuse by members of the military has decreased over the past 30 years, but research suggests that substance abuse is rising among veterans suffering from PTSD. Those who are suffering from PTSD often think that drinking a few beers or smoking a joint might seem like an easy way to forget about what happened, but the truth is that drugs and alcohol don't really fix anything, and often makes things worse. When you get drunk or high, you're not facing the real problem. You're just getting too wasted to care – and when you sober up, your problems will still be there.

## NOT WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED

### Prescription Drug Abuse

Sometimes, doctors prescribe drugs to patients dealing with PTSD. It's a common misconception that prescription medications are safe for anyone to take – regardless of whose name is on the label. The truth is a lot more complicated than that, though.

It's never a good idea to take someone else's prescription drugs. In fact, using prescriptions that don't belong to you (or even taking extra doses of your own prescriptions) is another form of drug abuse. You never know how a drug will interact with your body, and some drugs can have serious or even fatal effects when combined with alcohol or other drugs.



## UNHEALTHY CHOICE

### The Effects of Alcohol & Drug Abuse

In addition to not really solving any of your problems, drug and alcohol abuse can actually lead to entirely new problems, such as:

- Trouble at work
- Relationship problems
- Legal problems related to illegal drugs
- Greater risk of driving while drunk, buzzed or high
- Greater risk of having unprotected sex or engaging in other dangerous behavior
- Addiction
- Overdose or alcohol poisoning

## JOHN'S STORY

John just finished his fourth tour in Iraq and was back in the U.S. trying to get his life back in order. But he couldn't quite adjust. Any loud noises would send him running for cover. Each time he had a "flashback", he would break down into tears.

Oftentimes, he tried to justify in his head that he killed others to survive, and other times he felt guilty. He witnessed men, women and children being killed.

Days would go by for John with very little sleep. He started drinking heavily, he started getting violent and was arrested a few times for fighting in a bar. His wife couldn't take it anymore, so she asked him to get help.

John made an appointment with his local VA hospital. After several months of tests, they diagnosed him with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. John was prescribed medication and referred to a counselor in the hospital.

Finally, after years of suffering, John was at peace with himself. He joined Alcoholics Anonymous and was able to quit drinking. His marriage and life are back on track.

Not all PTSD stories end as well as John's did. But with the help of family, friends and medical professionals, IT CAN.

