



PTSD

Causes and Effects

Simplifying the Complicated

In General:

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety condition that can result from experiencing an event involving direct or indirect threat of death, serious injury or a physical threat. Such a life-threatening incident could be a car accident, a sexual assault, a natural disaster, physical assault or military combat.

Over the course of a lifetime, about 60 percent of men and 50 percent of women will experience a traumatic event. Most do not get PTSD. It's estimated that about 8 percent of the U.S. population will have PTSD symptoms at some point in their lives.

Causes and Effects:

The exact causes of PTSD are not known. When a traumatic event occurs, the brain gets revved up and is flooded with stress hormones.

In PTSD sufferers, the brain's metabolism has been altered by the rush of hormones, and memories of the event are stored in a different way.

PTSD symptoms include:

- flashbacks of the event
- nightmares
- inability to feel a range of emotions
- insomnia, difficulty concentrating
- persistent anxiety
- being easily startled

Signs of PTSD appear more severe and long-lasting if the traumatic event is man-made, such as in combat or with a violent crime.

PTSD symptoms may occur soon after the trauma, or it may be months or years before they develop. They might also reoccur over the years.

Combat-related PTSD

A major study published in 2004 estimated the risk for PTSD from service in the Iraq War at 18 percent and the estimated risk for PTSD from the Afghanistan War at 11 percent.

But research also shows that early symptoms of PTSD are not very good predictors of a long-term prognosis, according to a report from the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which was established by Congress in 1989 and operates within the Department of Veteran Affairs.

“Studies suggest that in the face of severe military service demands, including combat, most men and women do remarkably well across [their] lifespan,” the report says, adding a caution:

“On the other hand, if the mission is experienced as a failure, if soldiers deploy more than once, if new veterans who need services do not get the support they need, or if post-deployment demands and stressors mount, the lasting mental health toll of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq may increase over time.” (Continued)

Research shows that command support is one of the biggest factors contributing to service members starting and continuing PTSD treatment.



Interesting: Women are more than twice as likely as men to experience PTSD, perhaps because women are the more likely victims of sexual assault.

Women are more likely than men to seek mental-health treatment after a traumatic event.

Why do some service members experience combat-related PTSD while most do not? According to the National Center for PTSD, a person is more likely to develop PTSD if he or she was injured during the event, the trauma was long-lasting or if the person felt helpless during the trauma.

The likelihood of the disorder also increases if a person has previously experienced a trauma, has been the victim of childhood physical abuse or neglect, has a pre-existing mental-health problem or is repeatedly exposed to intense combat experiences. Some preliminary studies suggest there might also be a genetic component.



Treatment and Prognosis

There are successful treatments for PTSD, including cognitive behavioral therapy, certain prescription medications or a combination of both. Treatments may require several weeks or months. The chances for success are greatly increased if treatment begins early after symptoms are experienced.

Most people who are likely to recover from PTSD will do so within the first two years, by which time more than half will have recovered. Another 20 percent will recover over the next five years.

