



Addressing Sleep Challenges for Service Women

Information for Providers

1. Why is Sleep Hygiene Important?

Getting consistent restful sleep is important for overall wellness and health, inadequate sleep over time can increase the risk for chronic health problems.

- Research has found that **nearly 50% of military members experience poor sleep quality**, compared to 33% in the general population.

Service members face unique challenges that contribute to reduced sleep quality including:

- ✓ Occupational stressors e.g., prolonged operations, irregular shifts, and workload demands.
- ✓ Psychosocial pressures stemming from trauma, deployment, and relocation.
- ✓ Cultural norms within the military environment may deprioritize rest.

2. Consequences of Prolonged Inadequate Sleep

Inadequate sleep among military personnel has far-reaching effects on health, cognition, and operational readiness. Restful sleep is one of the most significant biological factors that can determine a service member's readiness and overall health. **Impairments from inadequate sleep hinder military performance.**

Consequences of inadequate sleep include:

- **Cognitive impairments:** Poor sleep disrupts brain regions, like the prefrontal cortex, leading to reduced decision-making speed, impaired judgment, and memory deficits.
- **Physical health impairments:** Poor sleep correlates with weight gain, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, and musculoskeletal injuries.

- The effects from continued lack of sleep can be equal to the effects from alcohol intoxication, increasing the risk for physical injury and for accidents during operations, training, or in combat environments



3. Service Specific Resources

For patients who are not seeking clinical treatment for sleep disorders, please find alternative service specific resources below:

- [Warfighter Wellness 30 Day Sleep Challenge](#) - Month-long guide to aid in establishing a sleep routine.
- [Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center Sleep Resources](#) - Comprehensive list of resources on sleep awareness, education, and treatment.
- [Veterans Affairs \(VA\) Path to Better Sleep Resource](#) - 4-step program to help screen for sleep disorders, improve sleep hygiene, and initiate self-treatment.
- [Walter Reed Army Institute of Research \(WRAIR\) Fatigue Management for Shift Workers Fact Sheet](#) - Resource with tips and tricks for optimal sleep during shift work.
- [WRAIR Fatigue Management During Nocturnal Operations Fact Sheet](#) - Resource with tips and tricks for optimal sleep during nocturnal missions.
- [Veterans Affairs \(VA\) Whole Health](#) - Virtual resources (e.g., mobile apps and podcasts) to aid in holistic health changes.
- [Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Obstructive Sleep Apnea/Insomnia](#) - Recorded webinar to provide important updates on VA/DOD clinical practice guidelines

4. Common Sleep Disorders in Service Members

1 Sleep Deprivation

- Sleep deprivation is the **lack of sleep**. Chronic sleep deprivation **impairs physical performance, cognitive function, and decision-making**.
- Military schedules often demand long hours for training, deployments, and 24-hour operations, leading to **increased risk of sleep deprivation**.

2 Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA)

- OSA is **common among service members** and is characterized by **repeated interruptions in breathing during sleep**.
- Symptoms include loud snoring, gasping for air, and excessive daytime sleepiness.

3 Circadian Rhythm Misalignment (CRM)

- CRM occurs when **sleep/wake schedules conflict with the body's internal clock**.
- **CRM is common in military personnel** due to 24-hour operations and rotating shifts.

4 Insomnia

- Insomnia is **difficulty falling or staying asleep**.
- Insomnia is **often linked to stress, trauma, or environmental factors** such as noise and light during deployment.

5 Parasomnias

- Parasomnias include **disorders such as night terrors, sleepwalking, and nightmares**.
- Parasomnias are often **exacerbated by trauma or mental health conditions** like Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

6 Mental Health Comorbidities

- **Mental health conditions** such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression **can impact sleep and lead to sleep disturbances**.
- Not only can **mental health conditions worsen sleep**, but **sleep disturbances can also exacerbate mental health conditions**, creating a negative cycle.

5. Treatment Options for Sleep Deprivation

If you have patients experiencing symptoms of chronic lack of sleep, below are key treatment options to aid in their care.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• CBT-I is a first-line, structured therapy targeting thoughts and behaviors that disrupt sleep.• Components of CBT-I include sleep hygiene, relaxation therapy, stimulus control, sleep restriction, and managing unhelpful thoughts about sleep.• CBT-I is delivered over four to eight sessions (in-person, online, or via self-help resources).• CBT-I has been shown to improve sleep onset, maintenance, and quality long-term, with fewer side effects than medication.• Consider recommending the CBT-I Coach mobile app to patients as a supplemental resource if CBT-I is unavailable at your facility.
Brief Behavioral Treatment for Insomnia (BBT-I)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• BBT-I was developed for primary care settings to provide accessible behavioral interventions and focuses on stimulus control and sleep restriction.• BBT-I is delivered in five brief visits (30 minutes or less).• Please visit this Defense Health Agency BBT-I for Primary Care resource for more information.
Relaxation Techniques (RTs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RTs include progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness, meditation, yoga, and breathwork.• Consistent use of RTs is shown to improve sleep onset and quality.• Please visit the Psychological Health Center of Excellence Real Warriors Campaign for more resources on yoga and mindfulness.
Medications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Medications for sleep are generally categorized into over-the-counter (OTC) options and prescription drugs.• OTC medication options include antihistamines (e.g., diphenhydramine or doxylamine) and supplements such as melatonin for managing short-term insomnia or jet lag.• Prescription options include sedative-hypnotics (e.g., zolpidem or eszopiclone) for managing short-term insomnia and newer developments like orexin receptor antagonists (e.g., suvorexant).• Antidepressants e.g., trazodone are also used off-label for sleep disorders.
Lifestyle Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lifestyle changes include exercise, reducing nicotine intake, improving nutrition, increasing hydration, limiting caffeine and alcohol, etc.• Implementation of lifestyle changes has been shown to improve sleep onset and quality.• Please visit the Uniformed Services University's Consortium for Health and Military Performance for more resources on lifestyle changes.

6. References

Please find references and citations for clinical information contained in this guide.

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