

Symptoms of PTSD may include:

- nightmares
- flashbacks
- emotional detachment or numbing of feelings
- insomnia
- irritability
- hyper-vigilance
- avoidance of reminders
- excessive startle response
- extreme distress when exposed to reminders or triggers
- memory loss
- self-medication through increased alcohol use or turning to drugs.

If you are a veteran who believes you may be experiencing symptoms of PTSD, contact your local VA mental health clinic. Discuss the problems you have and start the treatment and healing you deserve.

Some returning veterans seem to adjust well, only to develop problems from PTSD years or even decades later.

What is Traumatic Brain Injury?

Traumatic Brain Injury or TBI occurs when the head is struck with enough force to damage brain cells. This is called a concussion. In many cases, there may be no external injury, yet significant damage has occurred. Sometimes these are unfortunately called **minimal brain injuries**, but the

impact on the victim is more than minimal. This type of non-obvious injury may result in lifetime difficulties in cognition, memory and emotion.

The use of IED's in Iraq has resulted in many concussive injuries. The worst ones are easily identified, but all victims may continue to need help and understanding. If you are a veteran who suffered a concussion and believe you are having continuing difficulties since that time, contact the Brain Injury Help line or your local VA health clinic for help.

For Help and Information, contact the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs

1-800-828-8801

or in Salem, call **503-373-2000**

They will provide more information and put you in touch with a Veterans' Service Officer who can assist you.

www.oregon.gov/odva

These may also be helpful:

U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs (VA)

Benefits Line 1-800-827-1000

www.va.gov

Brain Injury Help 1-800-870-9244

www.dvbic.org

VA Clinic

Portland 1-800-949-1004

or 503-220-8262

Gulf War Resource Center..... www.ngwrc.org

UNSEEN INJURIES



Medical Information for Recent Veterans

Veterans of Operation Desert Shield or Desert Storm

Gulf War Syndrome

Veterans of recent service in Iraq or Afghanistan

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)



This pamphlet was created by the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs in cooperation with the Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs.

Some veterans return home with injuries that are obvious to everyone. Others may suffer silently, because their injuries are real but are not seen by others. If you or your loved one either served in the Persian Gulf during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm or have recently returned from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, this information may be important to you.

What is Gulf War Syndrome?

Gulf War Syndrome (GWS) or **Gulf War Illness (GWI)** are names given to a group of illnesses associated with service during Desert Shield and Desert Storm. There is considerable confusion concerning these very real ailments, because they encompass more than one ailment. Theories about the causes of these illnesses often point to reactions to substances encountered during that service. Some of the suspected substances (alone or in combination) have been theorized to include:

- the nerve gas defense pill (PB tablets)
- low-level nerve gas from destroyed munitions
- excess and multiple insecticides and repellants
- dust from depleted uranium (DU) in or on vehicles struck by DU munitions
- certain immunizations
- infectious agents occurring naturally in the region
- pollutants from oil well fires

Because there appear to be multiple syndromes, symptoms may vary depending upon exposure. Some symptoms that may be or have been present at some point include:

- chronic fatigue
- weakness or loss of muscle control
- diarrhea, indigestion or other gastrointestinal problems
- migraines and/or other headaches
- dizziness and/or loss of balance
- memory problems
- difficulty concentrating
- muscle and/or joint pain
- skin problems
- shortness of breath

Since these symptoms are common to other disorders, some skeptics don't recognize how real this problem is. Scientific research has demonstrated higher rates for these problems than in comparable veterans who were not deployed. Additionally, Gulf War veterans have experienced death rates exceeding those of U.S. Vietnam veterans.

Some veterans may receive a different diagnosis of a disease that produces similar symptoms, such as chronic fatigue syndrome, irritable bowel syndrome or fibromyalgia. In addition to the Gulf War Syndrome, increased rates of brain cancer and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease) may be related to service during the Persian Gulf War.

If you have health issues you believe are related to your Gulf War service, you should contact your local VA Medical Center for a Persian Gulf Registry Exam. If appropriate, you may be able to have family members examined once you have undergone the exam.

IMPORTANT REMINDER

In the past, the VA used cut-off dates for developing symptoms or diagnosis of the Gulf War Syndrome to establish service connection. Although these rules often change, it is important to document when you sought care to preserve your rights. If you sought care many years ago, request a copy of your records. Civilian medical records are often destroyed after 10 years.

What is PTSD?

A significant number of veterans returning from recent service in Iraq and Afghanistan may be suffering from **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**. This condition has been present in most major conflicts in U.S. history. During the Civil War it was called **Soldier's Heart**, during WWI **Shell Shock**, during WWII and Korea **Combat Fatigue**. Since Vietnam, it has been named **PTSD**. It describes psychological consequences of exposure to, or confrontation with, stressful experiences that the victim experiences as highly traumatic. It is occasionally called **post-traumatic stress reaction** to emphasize that it is a result of traumatic experience rather than a pre-existing psychological weakness.