



Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

VA's Office of Research and Development supports numerous studies aimed at understanding, treating, and preventing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These studies range from investigations of the genetic or biochemical underpinnings of the disease to evaluations of new or existing treatments, including large multisite clinical trials. A VA study published in 2007 found that of 103,788 veterans of operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom veterans seen at VA facilities between 2001 and 2005, some 13 percent had received a diagnosis of PTSD.

Examples of VA research advances

- **Drug may help PTSD nightmares**—In pilot studies, VA researchers based at the Puget Sound VA found that prazosin, an inexpensive generic drug already used by millions of Americans for high blood pressure and prostate problems, may improve sleep and reduce trauma nightmares for veterans with PTSD. No drug has previously been found to effectively improve these PTSD symptoms. A large, multisite trial to confirm the effectiveness of prazosin for this purpose is now under way.
- **Prolonged-exposure therapy shown effective**—VA researchers showed that prolonged-exposure therapy—in which therapists help patients recall their trauma memories under safe, controlled conditions—was effective in reducing PTSD symptoms in women veterans who developed PTSD after experiencing sexual trauma in the military. Women in the trial who received prolonged-exposure therapy had greater reductions of PTSD symptoms than those who received only emotional support and counseling focused on current problems.
- **Clinical trial for veterans with chronic PTSD**—VA has launched the first ever multi-center clinical trial of a drug to treat military-related chronic PTSD. The study will involve 400 veterans at 20 VA medical centers nationwide and will evaluate whether risperidone, one of the safest and most extensively studied antipsychotic medications, is effective in veterans with chronic PTSD who continue to have symptoms despite receiving antidepressant medications.

Facts About PTSD

PTSD is a psychiatric disorder that can affect people who have experienced life-threatening events, such as combat, a terrorist attack, or a personal assault. Symptoms include flashbacks, nightmares, depression, and social withdrawal, as well as physical health changes. Treatment often includes anti-anxiety drugs or other medication, as well as exposure therapy, a form of cognitive-behavioral therapy in which patients recall their traumas in a safe setting and gradually learn to adjust their emotional response.

