

of uncertainty, your healthcare team will use every avenue possible to identify your deployment-related concerns and treat you.

It helps to remember that most serious or life-threatening diseases can be detected after a careful history, exam, and testing. If a healthcare provider tells you that you have "medically unexplained symptoms" after appropriate clinical diagnostic tests, that doesn't mean your doctor thinks you're completely well or that it's all in your head. It means that a cause for your symptoms cannot be identified. Fortunately, it also means that you are very unlikely to have a life-threatening illness. Based on their assessment, your healthcare team can say what you don't have, even when they can't put a definite name on what you do have.

In all cases, rest assured your healthcare provider will treat your symptoms, even if the underlying cause is not known. And your provider will continue to follow-up with you to determine if you have developed any new symptoms and to ensure that the treatment for your symptoms is working in the most effective way possible.

There is also a lot you can do for yourself. Keeping a positive attitude and maintaining good health habits like appropriate exercise, eating right, and spiritual practices, as well as avoiding tobacco use can all help. You can be proactive and your choices can influence how your symptoms affect your quality of life. In partnership with your healthcare provider, you can find effective solutions for managing your unexplained physical symptoms.

How Can I Find Out More?

- **Visit www.PDHealth.mil:** This Web site, sponsored by the DHCC, contains a variety of information on deployment-related health concerns including MUPS.
- **Sign Up for the DHCC Daily Email Newsletter:** This electronic newsletter covers health issues related to military service, deployment, homeland security, and the War on Terrorism and includes topics such as environmental and occupational health, medications, immunizations, biological and chemical warfare, and medically unexplained symptoms. To subscribe, visit www.PDHealth.mil and select DHCC Newsletter, or go directly to www.PDHealth.mil/nl_signup.asp.

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Medically Unexplained Physical Symptoms (MUPS)

A Guide for Re-Deploying
Service Members



Brought to you by
**Deployment Health
Clinical Center**



Post-Deployment Health

Your recent deployment may have involved exposure to health threats such as infections, diseases, insect bites, chemicals, pollution, and obstacles to maintaining good hygiene. In addition, the long hours and continual need for a high state of alertness may have been a source of increased physical or psychological stress and fatigue. While most service members do not experience long-term health consequences as a result of their deployments, some do. Studies have shown that after a deployment, a small percentage of veterans experience Medically Unexplained Physical Symptoms (MUPS).

What Do You Mean by Medically Unexplained Physical Symptoms?

The term Medically Unexplained Physical Symptoms (MUPS) is used to describe a situation where an individual experiences multiple, ongoing physical symptoms for which their healthcare provider can find no specific cause. These physical symptoms may include:

- **Headaches**
- **Fatigue**
- **Memory Loss**
- **Unexpected Weight Changes**
- **Sleep Problems**
- **Joint Pain**
- **Skin Rash**
- **Digestive Problems**

For reasons that are not completely understood, some service members develop symptoms like these after a deployment.



Communities or groups affected by a disaster or a terrorist attack are also at some risk for developing MUPS. Experience after the Oklahoma City bombing showed that 2% of the affected individuals were at risk for developing some form of MUPS. Sometimes these symptoms are temporary and easily treated, while other times they may be chronic and challenging to treat.



It will probably surprise you to learn that having medically unexplained physical symptoms is not that uncommon. Chances are that 10% of the general population has some sort of ongoing physical symptom like those listed above. If a person with these symptoms were to seek medical care and the doctor could not discover the underlying cause of his or her complaints, the doctor would still treat the symptoms. As a matter of fact, studies show that a third of the time, when a patient seeks medical care, his or her doctor cannot tell for certain what is causing the patient's health concern!

What Is the Military Healthcare Community Doing About MUPS?

Following the 1991 Gulf War, some veterans of the conflict began to visit their healthcare providers with varied physical symptoms. In some cases, the causes were uncertain. This situation prompted the DoD military healthcare system to more thoroughly research the issue of post-deployment health. It is now well known that after every armed conflict since the Civil War, some combat veterans have been affected

by unexplained physical symptoms. The Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs have created the Post-Deployment Health Clinical Practice Guideline (PDH-CPG) to guide military healthcare providers as they treat service members with deployment-related health concerns. Included in this guideline are methods for diagnosing MUPS, as well as treatment strategies and referral guidance. There is also an associated guideline just for MUPS.

The DoD has also set up specific centers for research about and treatment of post-deployment health concerns. One of these is the Deployment Health Clinical Center (DHCC) located at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

What Should I Do if I Experience Troublesome Physical Symptoms Following a Deployment?

Make an appointment to see your Primary Care Provider. During each Primary Care visit, the healthcare team should ask you, **"Is your health concern today related to a deployment?"** When you answer, **"Yes,"** to this question, your provider will use the PDH-CPG to diagnose and treat your deployment-related health concern.

Your provider may order tests to try to determine what is causing your symptoms. Referrals to specialists may also be included to assist in diagnosis or treatment. During this process, your healthcare provider may also seek assistance from the DHCC in evaluating your concerns. While medicine has come a long way, we still don't know everything. In spite of any element

