



Combat-Related Stress Reactions

Presented by: Heidi Bearden
Wing Family Program Coordinator

Overview

- If you are a service member or veteran experiencing a combat-related stress reaction, this presentation is for you and your loved ones.
- Military life has unique stresses. Most of these stresses do not lead to severe reactions. But some can.

What is stress?

- It's a normal physical and emotional response to life changes – even positive ones.
- Everyone feels stress sometimes. But too much stress can interfere with daily life. Some signs of too much stress include:
 - Physical problems, such as headaches, upset stomach and high blood pressure
 - Poor circulation, trouble making decisions, problems remembering things
 - Feeling anxious, frustrated, angry or depressed

Stress can start in the pre-deployment phase

- For example, service members may feel stress about:
 - Leaving their loved ones behind
 - Personal, legal or financial problems
 - Their own safety and the safety of their loved ones

Deployment may bring other stresses

- Service members may experience stress about:
 - Last-minute changes in deployment orders
 - Adjusting to a new place or a foreign country
 - New responsibilities during deployment
- And even though reintegration can be a happy time, it can also cause stress.

Being in a war zone can lead to more severe stress

- For example, service members may be exposed to:
 - Harsh living conditions
 - Overwork, fatigue and sleep deprivation
 - Excessive heat, cold and noise
 - Constant risk of injury or death
 - Radiological, biological, chemical or nuclear weapons
 - Death or injury of fellow soldiers or civilians
- In addition, combat involves being fired upon and firing upon the enemy – an extremely stressful situation.

Stress reactions are common in war zones

- Anywhere from 8 to 30% of men and women who have served in war zones will have a severe stress reaction at some point.

Traumatic stress differs from other stress

- It's a reaction to a terrifying event or to being repeatedly exposed to danger. Combat can cause traumatic stress.

Combat Stress

- This is a short-term reaction to being in a war zone. It usually begins with a few days of being exposed to combat and lasts less than one month. Symptoms may include:
 - Strong emotions such as fear, worry, anger
 - Trouble making decision
 - Exhaustion, trouble sleeping, nightmares
 - Racing heart, sweating, trembling, nausea.

Combat Stress

- Combat stress reactions usually resolve without treatment. But some service members may experience severe or more prolonged reactions. They may not be able to function effectively in combat. This is sometimes called “battle fatigue.” With treatment, soldiers can often return to duty within several days to a few weeks.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- It usually begins within about 3 months after combat or other traumatic event(s). It shares a number of symptoms with combat stress. But people with PTSD have symptoms that continue longer than a few weeks, PTSD can severely affect a person's ability to function. It can be:
 - Acute – lasting 1 – 3 months
 - Chronic – lasting over 3 months to years
 - Delayed – beginning months to years after the trauma
- Service members or veterans can develop delayed PTSD after they return home from deployment.

Other military situations besides combat may cause traumatic stress

- For example, traumatic stress can occur in service members or veterans who were:
 - Involved in peacekeeping missions
 - Exposed to terrorists attacks
 - Taken prisoners of war
 - Responsible for the care of enemy prisoners
 - Involved in cleanup of war zones
 - Sexually assaulted or harassed during active duty
 - Witness to or victims of injuring during training

PTSD is a severe, prolonged reaction to traumatic stress

- It affects a person's
 - relationships
 - work
 - health
 - other parts of daily life.

A Person with PTSD

- Relives the traumatic event(s)
 - He or she may have:
 - Persistent, unwanted memories
 - Painful emotions associated with the event (s)
 - Flashbacks or hallucinations
 - Repeated, distressing dreams or nightmares

A Person with PTSD

- Avoids situations, people and feelings
 - He or she may:
 - Feel numb – not be able to feel or express emotions
 - Feel detached from people
 - Stay away from situations that remind him or her of the traumatic event(s)
 - Have trouble remembering important details of the event
 - Have little interest in activities he or she used to enjoy
 - Think he or she has no future or that his or her life span may be shortened

A Person with PTSD

- Acts as though danger is still present
 - In PTSD, a person's physical reaction to stress can stay activated – even when there is no danger. He or she may:
 - Become suddenly irritable, angry or even violent
 - Have trouble sleeping
 - Have difficulty concentrating
 - Startle easily (when exposed to certain noises, for example)
 - Misinterpret other people's intentions or actions as aggressive or dangerous
 - Be on the lookout for dangers

A Person with PTSD

- Physical symptoms as also common
 - For example, a person with PTSD may have:
 - Headaches
 - Stomachaches or diarrhea
 - Chest pain
 - Dizziness
 - Other aches and pains
 - Other problems could also cause these symptoms. If you have any of these symptoms, see a health-care provider for a medical checkup.

A Person with PTSD

- Some service members may be at higher risk for PTSD or other combat-related stress reactions.
 - These include people who:
 - Were physically or sexually abused as children
 - Are or were victims of domestic violence
 - Have other mental health problems, such as anxiety or depression
 - Have witnessed or been victims of other traumatic events such as car crashes, earthquakes, rape or terrorist events.
 - Have other major problems in their lives, such as financial, legal or relationship problems

A Person with PTSD

- Getting the right diagnosis is important.
 - Only a health-care provider or mental health professional can diagnose PTSD. Generally, to receive a diagnosis of PTSD, a person must:
 - Have gone through a traumatic event(s) that caused intense fear, helplessness or horror
 - Reliving the traumatic event(s), avoiding people or situations, and acting as though danger is still present – after the traumatic event(s)
 - Experience significant distress from symptoms
 - Have symptoms for longer than one month
 - A health-care provider or mental health professional can also determine if a person has some other combat-related stress reaction, even if that person does not meet the criteria for a PTSD diagnosis.

PTSD and other Combat-Related Stress Reactions are Manageable

- With treatment, most service members and veterans with combat-related stress reactions can lead full, satisfying lives. Generally, symptoms lessen over time.
- Some people may experience continuing flare-ups of their symptoms
 - for example, when they are exposed to a situation or event that reminds them of the old trauma. But they can learn to manage their symptoms.

Asking for help is a sign of *Strength* – not weakness

- It's the first step you must take to manage a combat-related stress reaction.
- If you have PTSD or another combat-related stress reaction, you don't need to go it alone. **Get** the help you need.

Asking for help is a sign of *Strength* – not weakness

- Your military service is there for you.
 - Depending on whether you are currently active duty, a Reserve or National Guard member or a veteran, you can get help from:
 - The mental health or combat stress control team assigned to your unit
 - The health-care clinic at your installation
 - A chaplain or other spiritual leader
 - Your Family Readiness Center
 - A VA hospital
 - Private sources, such as a health-care provider, mental health professional or clinic

Asking for help is a sign of *Strength* – not weakness

- Learning about combat-related stress reactions is a powerful step.
 - A health-care provider or mental health professional can give you information about combat-related stress reaction, including PTSD. You can also get information from the:
 - National Center for PTSD Department of Veterans Affairs
 - www.ncptsd.org
 - Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress
 - www.usuhs.mil/psy/traumaticstress/newcenter.html

Asking for help is a sign of *Strength* – not weakness

- You can manage combat-related stress reactions, such as PTSD.
 - Some combat-related stress reactions can be managed with only rest and support. But other combat-related stress reactions, such as PTSD, may require treatment. Treatment may involve:
 - Psychotherapy
 - Medications
 - Self-help techniques, such as anger management and ways to control stress reactions.

Ignoring a combat-related stress reaction won't make it go away

- It can make your problems worse. If you don't seek help, you may find that you :
 - Are isolated from your loved one, friends and family
 - Use anger to control others
 - Have trouble getting along with others at work
 - Feel more and more depressed and anxious
 - Use alcohol or other drugs to manage your feelings

Your health-care provider may recommend psychotherapy

- He or she will decide what type(s) may be most effective for your condition.
 - Cognitive therapy
 - Exposure therapy
 - Psychodynamic therapy
 - Group therapy

Cognitive Therapy

- Cognitive therapy helps a person recognize negative thoughts and beliefs he or she may have about the trauma. The therapist then helps the person to replace these thoughts and beliefs with more positive ones.
- For example, a service member may feel guilt that he or she survived a bombing by the enemy, while others did not. The therapist will help the service member see that, while the event was tragic, the service member had no control over who survived.

Exposure Therapy

- Exposure therapy helps reduce the fear and distress of PTSD or other combat-related stress reactions. A therapist helps the person imagine places, situations, thoughts and feelings surrounding the trauma. Over a number of sessions, the person gets more and more used to talking and thinking about the trauma without reacting to it so strongly.
- For example, a therapist may guide a service member through the details of helping wounded civilians. By repeatedly facing the incident, the service member's feelings of horror and grief may eventually lessen.

Psychodynamic Therapy

- Psychodynamic therapy is based on exploring inner fears and emotional conflict a service member may have about the trauma.
- In addition, the therapist provides a safe and supportive environment for the person to discuss the meaning of the trauma.

Group Therapy

- Group therapy involves participating in therapy with other people who have experienced trauma. Group therapy is led by a therapist. It can involve different types of therapy – cognitive, exposure, psychodynamic and others.
- Group therapy helps people who have experienced trauma realize that they are not alone in their feelings and experiences. It can also help them learn how to relate to other people in a more rewarding way.

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)

- Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) is a newer treatment for traumatic stress reactions. During EMDR, a person forms a detailed mental image of a traumatic event. The therapist then moves his or her fingers slowly from side to side while the person follows the therapist's finger movement with his or her eyes. The therapist may use other side-to-side motions or sounds. This helps the brain process traumatic images. Once the brain has processed the trauma in this way, symptoms may lessen.

Marital/Family Therapy

- Marital/family therapy may be useful when a person's marriage or family life has been affected by traumatic stress. It can help the person and his or her family work through problems. However, the person with the traumatic stress reaction will usually require individual therapy.

Spiritual Counseling

- Spiritual Counseling can help a service member regain a sense of safety and purpose in life that traumatic events, such as war, often shatter. A chaplain, minister, priest, rabbi or other spiritual leader can help the person find meaning in the trauma and reconnect with his or her spirituality.

Other Types of Therapy

- Other types of therapy may include:
 - Stress inoculation training (SIT) – a person learning coping skills to help “inoculate” or protect him- or herself from the intense feelings of distress that often accompany traumatic stress reactions.
 - Imagery rehearsal therapy (IRT) – with the help of a therapist, a person can gain control over nightmares or flashback by changing the images to more positive ones.

Medications May Be Prescribed

- If you have combat-related stress reaction that is severe or prolonged, your health-care provider may recommend combining psychotherapy with medications*, such as:
 - Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)
 - Antidepressants
 - Other antidepressants
 - Tricyclics
 - Nefazodone or trazadone

***NOTE:** Antidepressants and other medications can take time to work. Ask your health-care provider when you should start feeling better.

Using Alcohol or Drugs can make any combat-related stress reaction worse

- Alcohol and other drugs are not a way to cope. They can:
 - Cause addiction
 - Harm your body and mind
 - Cause problems with friends and family
 - Worsen feelings of anger and depression
 - Put you and others at risk for car crashes and other life-threatening mishaps

Using Alcohol or Drugs can make any combat-related stress reaction worse

- Get help if you need it.
 - Ask for help at your Family Readiness Center, from a chaplain, at your service's substance abuse treatment program, or at a local VA facility
 - Call the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment's National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357).
 - Look in the phone book for numbers of local self-help groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA).

Making Safe Choices

- As part of managing traumatic stress, it can help to ensure that your home, surroundings and relationships are safe.
- Your sense of safety and well-being are important. Take steps to protect yourself. It can help you feel more in control again.

If you live in an unsafe neighborhood, consider moving

- Survivors of traumatic events often feel that the world is a dangerous place. If you live in a neighborhood that has frequent robberies, assaults and drug-related crimes, consider moving to a safer place if possible. Moving is a major undertaking, but it could help lessen traumatic memories and reactions. It could also renew your faith in your ability to stay safe.
- If you are in a PTSD or other traumatic stress treatment program, your case manager or mental health professional may be able to help you find new housing.

If you are in an abusive relationship, get help to leave it

- Family violence is never OK. In many cases, family violence is a serious crime. And family violence of any kind may hinder your ability to manage traumatic stress. It may also make it difficult for you to feel safe again.
- If your spouse or partner is physically, sexually or verbally abusive, put your safety (and your children) first. Seek help from your Family Readiness Center, a chaplain or another spiritual leader, or a mental health professional.
- If you think you may be in immediate danger, leave at once. Notify your Family Readiness Center or call 9-1-1. You can also call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233.

Limit Your Exposure to Traumatic Stories in the Media

- For a service member or veteran who has been exposed to trauma, reading about, listening to or viewing stories about traumatic events can trigger traumatic stress symptoms.
- Think about limiting how much you read, listen to or watch the news. Choose another positive activity instead, such as going for a bike ride, reading a good book or watching an uplifting movie.

Letting Go of Anger

- People coping with a traumatic stress reaction often have a lot of anger. Too much anger can harm your relationships, work life and even your health.
- But you can take steps to control anger.

Letting Go of Anger

- Getting help for managing your anger.
 - Learning how to take control of your anger may be one of the most challenging problems you face. But help is available. Consider joining an anger management group. It can help you:
 - Understand why anger is part of traumatic stress
 - Learn what feelings and thoughts signal that you are getting angry
 - Control anger through managing stress
 - Communicate with others more effectively
 - You may be able to find an anger management group through a PTSD treatment program or at a VA facility. Ask your health-care provider, mental health professional or counselor.

Letting Go of Anger

- Take a time out.
 - When you feel signs that you are getting angry and start think angry thoughts, follow these suggestions:
 - Say to yourself, “Stop”
 - Try to relax – count to 100, take a walk, or take some deep breaths
 - Leave if necessary – if you feel angry with someone else, tell him or her you need to take time out
 - Go to a safe place and calm down
 - Once you feel more in control, go back and talk with the person or face the situation that triggered your anger

Letting Go of Anger

- Find healthy ways to express anger.
 - If you are angry with someone, use these tips to help you communicate more effectively.
 - Think carefully before you speak
 - Explain the problem. Calmly and clearly say why you're angry. Don't yell, use insults or make threats
 - Use "I" statements, such as "I felt angry when you ...". These statements focus on you and your needs. They also avoid blaming the other person
 - Say what you would like to change. Find a solution you can both agree on, and give it a try
- You can control anger – anger does not have to control you.

Helping yourself when you are depressed

- A person with a severe stress reaction may be at risk for serious depression
 - Some service members with combat-related stress reactions may feel depressed, hopeless, guilty or sad. Having to cope with other symptoms, such as anxiety, may also lead to depression. A person with severe traumatic stress reaction may also be more likely to act on impulse. This can put him or her at further risk for suicide.

Helping yourself when you are depressed

- Depression is treatable.
 - Psychotherapy, medication and self-help techniques can help ease depression. If you feel depressed, seek treatment from a health-care provider or mental health professional.

Helping yourself when you are depressed

- If you are depressed, take small, positive actions.
 - If can give you a new hope. Think about what would make you feel better. Here are suggestions:
 - If you can, get away for awhile or go on leave. Sometimes a change of scene can give you a new outlook on life
 - Stay busy with work, friends and family. If you are depressed, a daily schedule can give you something to look forward to
 - Get some exercise. Exercise has been shown to help with stress and depression
 - Eat nourishing, healthy foods
 - Do something enjoyable every day, such as a hobby, watching a movie or going for a walk
- Remember...no problem is too big to solve!

If you are thinking about Suicide...

- Get help right away.
 - Contact your installation's health-care facility, your Family Readiness Center, a chaplain, a VA hospital, or a private health-care provider or mental health professional. You can also call:
 - Military OneSource
 - 1-800-342-9647
 - 800-3429-6477 (international toll-free)
 - 1-484-530-5908 (international collect)
 - National Hopeline Network
 - 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)
 - In an emergency, call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number.

If you are thinking about Suicide...

- Take these steps.
 - Review your accomplishments. Think of all the people you have helped, the good things you have done and the ways in which your life has benefited others.
 - Share your feelings with a close friend, a chaplain or someone else you trust. Don't keep your feelings bottled up inside.
 - Make a pact with friends, a family member, a chaplain or a health-care provider. Promise to contact them if you start to have suicidal thoughts. Keep their phone numbers handy, and be sure they know how to help you.

A Note to Family and Friends

- If someone you know is deeply depressed:
- Know the warning signs of suicide. The person may:
 - Talk about harming him- or herself
 - Prepare for death – for example, make a will or give away possessions
 - Seem suddenly happier – a possible sign that the person has decided to end his or her life

A Note to Family and Friends

- Know what to do. If you think someone is at risk for suicide:
 - Take the person's feelings seriously
 - Talk openly with him or her about your concerns
 - Show that you care and want to help
 - Do not leave the person alone
 - Get help from you Family Readiness Center, your chaplain, a VA facility or a mental health professional
 - If it is an emergency, call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number
- Don't hesitate to get help – your life is worth it!

Relaxation Techniques

- Practicing one or more of these techniques daily can help you manage combat-related stress reactions, including PTSD.
 - Deep Breathing
 - Meditation

Relaxation Techniques

- Deep Breathing
 - You can use this simple technique any time and anywhere.
 - Get in a comfortable position
 - Exhale first, clearing your lungs completely
 - Inhale slowly through your nose. Draw air deeply into your belly to a point below your navel.
 - Exhale slowly through your mouth. Push out as much air as you can. Try to make your exhalation twice as long as your inhalation.
 - While you are exhaling, imagine that you are letting go of tension, painful memories or distressing emotions.
 - Repeat a few time, until you feel better.

Relaxation Techniques

- Meditation
 - It can help you soothe stressful reactions. Over time, it can help you see your feelings and reactions from a more objective viewpoint. Try this simple technique.
 - Get in a comfortable position.
 - Gently close your eyes.
 - Think of a soothing word or phrase to focus on, such as “love” or “peaceful”. Or, you may want to visualize a calming scene.
 - Try to focus your mind on the word, phrase or image you have chosen. If other thoughts come into your mind, just notice them briefly and let them go.
 - Let your breathing slow down. You may want to silently repeat the word or phrase in time with your inhalation or exhalation.
 - Start off with just 5 minutes. As you feel more comfortable, you can meditate for a longer period of time.

Relaxation Techniques

Progressive muscle relaxation

- This technique can help you learn to physically relax during a stress reaction. With practice, it can also help you identify when you are tensing your muscles.
 - Wear loose, comfortable clothing. Sit in a favorite chair or lie down.
 - Begin with your facial muscles. Frown hard for 5-10 seconds and then relax all your muscles.
 - Work other facial muscles by scrunching your face up or knitting your eyebrows for 5-10 seconds. Release. Notice the difference between tense and relaxed muscles.

Relaxation Techniques

Progressive muscle relaxation (con't.)

- Move on to your jaw. Clench your teeth, then relax.
- Shrug your shoulders. Pull them toward your ears. Hold for 5-10 seconds. Then relax.
- Clench your fist and tighten your arm. Relax. Repeat to other arm.
- Take in a deep breath. Hold it for a few seconds. Let it go.
- Tense your leg, then relax. Repeat with other leg.
- You can repeat this sequence a few times. Notice any difference in how you feel.

Tips for practicing relaxation techniques

- Try to be consistent in your practice if you can. Practice once or twice a day.
- Practice in a quiet, relaxing place where you will be alone.
- Turn off the telephone and TV.
- Make sure your clothing and the temperature of the room are comfortable.
- After you have tried different techniques, choose the one that works best for you.
- Stick with it – you may need to practice for a few weeks before you begin to feel the benefits.
- Use your chosen technique any time you feel particularly stressed or are having traumatic stress symptoms.

Other ways to relax

- Other activities can also help you calm down and feel relaxed. For example, you could try:
 - Practicing yoga
 - Taking time for prayer
 - Reading spiritual or inspirational books
 - Listening to quiet music
 - Drawing or writing in a journal
 - Playing with your child, or with a pet
 - Talking with a friend or counselor
 - exercising

Reconnecting with Others

- Breaking through isolation is an important part of managing traumatic stress.
 - Consider joining a self-help group for survivors
 - Make a special effort with loved ones

Reconnecting with Others

- Consider joining a self-help group for survivors
- It can help to talk with other service members who have survived traumatic events. It can also help to increase your contact with other people. If you feel distrustful of others, it can help you learn to trust again.
- You can find self-help groups through your:
 - Health-care provider, mental health professional or clinic
 - Family Center
 - Post-deployment program
 - Local VA facility

Reconnecting with Others

- Make a special effort with loved ones
- If you have become distance from loved one, try taking small steps to reconnect with them again.
For example:
 - If you have problems in your marriage or another close relationship, seek counseling. It can help you work out your problems together.
 - If you are not close with your children, try reaching out to them show an interest in their schoolwork, activities and hobbies. Try to be there for them when they need you.
 - If you have lost touch with close friends, try getting in touch again. Call, or send a letter or an email. Get together for a cup of coffee or a short walk.

You can enjoy life again!

- If you are coping with a traumatic stress reaction, such as PTSD, it's important that you find activities that you enjoy and give you a sense of accomplishment.

You can enjoy life again!

- Do an enjoyable activity everyday.
 - You may have forgotten about the activities you used to enjoy before the traumatic event. Or, you may feel that you could never enjoy those things now. But you deserve to enjoy life. Do at least one activity every day that makes you happy. For example you should:
 - Read a book
 - Take a walk
 - Write a poem or story
 - Do some gardening
 - Play a favorite sport
 - Draw or paint

You can enjoy life again!

- Call a friend
- Sing or play music
- See a movie
- Enjoy a special food
- Don't forget to laugh!
 - Humor is a great way to let go of stress and feel good. Try watching a funny movie, seeing a comedy show or sharing a joke with someone.
- Pace yourself.
 - Take things slowly. You don't have to do everything at once. Taking small steps will soon result in big changes.

You can enjoy life again!

- Considering volunteering.
- It can help you feel that you have something to offer others. And it can help you reconnect with your community. There are many opportunities to give your time and effort. You could volunteer:
 - At a school
 - For a youth program
 - At a homeless shelter
 - To give blood
 - At your place of worship
 - To help other people who have witnessed traumatic events
 - To donate money for a cause you believe in

Traumatic Stress and Spirituality

- Reconnecting with your spirituality can renew feelings of well-being, safety and hope.
- You may be questioning your spiritual beliefs.
 - Witnessing or experiencing combat or other war-zone related trauma may have shaken your spiritual core. You may no longer believe what you used to believe. It may seem as though the world lacks meaning or purpose, or that your higher power has abandoned you.

Traumatic Stress and Spirituality

- Take time to think about your beliefs.
 - If you are experiencing a crisis of faith, try to see this as an opportunity to reconsider what spirituality means to you. At first, this may seem difficult. Give yourself plenty of time to develop a new sense of faith and hope.

Traumatic Stress and Spirituality

- Spirituality can help you heal.
 - For example, it can help you:
 - Feel connected to the rest of the world
 - Get through difficult time
 - Accept yourself
 - Offer help to others
 - Feel that life has meaning

Traumatic Stress and Spirituality

- Talk with your chaplain or other spiritual leader.
 - Many military chaplains or those working with the VA have extensive knowledge about PTSD and other combat-related stress reaction. They understand how combat-related stress reactions can affect a service member's or veteran's spirituality and can help you in managing combat-related stress.

Traumatic Stress and Spirituality

- Ways to reconnect
 - Only you can decide how best to explore your spiritual beliefs. But you may find these suggestions helpful:
 - Attend services at your place of worship, or try visiting a new place of worship
 - Read scriptures, books about philosophy or religion or other inspirational books
 - Devote some time every day to prayer, meditation or another spiritual practice
 - Attend a spiritual retreat through your place of worship or community center
 - Join a discussion group about spirituality or religion
 - Find a self-help group that has a spiritual focus, such as a 12-step program

Take Care of Yourself

Feeling your best can help ease the effects of traumatic stress.

- Eat a healthy diet
 - Poor eating habits can make you feel worse. Choose a variety of fruits, vegetables and grains (at least should be whole grains). These foods will give your body and mind the energy, vitamins and minerals they need. Avoid caffeine – it can alter your mood and make stress reactions worse. Skipping meals or eating too quickly can also make you feel worse.

Take Care of Yourself

Get the right amount of sleep.

- too little or too much can make you feel worse. Try to go to bed and get up at the same times every day.
- If you have trouble sleeping or if you have nightmares, tell your health-care provider or mental health professional. Don't self-prescribe medications to help you sleep – it can make the problem worse or delay you from getting the help you need.

Take Care of Yourself

Exercise regularly.

- Exercise has many benefits. It can help:
 - Relieve symptoms, such as anxiety and stress reactions
 - Lift your mood
 - Improve your self-esteem
 - Improve your sleep
 - Enable you to look and feel your best
 - Most adults should get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week. Consider walking, jogging or swimming. Be sure to include warm-up and cool-down periods.
 - Talk to your health-care provider before starting an exercise program.

For Family and Friends

If you have a loved one coping with a combat-related stress reaction, here are some ways to help:

- Learn about PTSD and other combat-related stress reactions.
 - It will help you understand what your loved one is going through. It will also give you resources you can use to help yourself and your loved one. You can learn about combat-related stress reactions by:
 - Taking a class in PTSD or traumatic stress at a clinic or community center
 - Reading books or watching films about PTSD or traumatic stress
 - Finding PTSD or traumatic stress web sites
 - Talking with a mental health professional or counselor
 - Joining a self-help group

For Family and Friends

- Get counseling if needed.
- Your loved one's reaction to traumatic stress can seriously affect your relationship. For example, you may:
 - Be fearful of talking about the traumatic event
 - Have difficulty talking to your loved one
 - Feel emotionally cut off from him or her
 - Be discouraged that your loved on has not recovered from the trauma
- Marital or family counseling can help you and your loved one deal with these issues together. Even if he or she does not want to go to counseling, get help for yourself.

For Family and Friends

- Offer support and safety.
- Just being there for your loved one can be a tremendous comfort. It can help him or her avoid the isolation that often comes with a severe stress reaction. Here are some other ways to offer support:
 - If your loved one wants to talk about his or her experiences, be there to listen.
 - Let your loved one talk about the traumatic event at his or her own pace.
 - Believe what your loved one tells you. Don't minimize what he or she has been through.
 - Avoid trying to solve your loved one's problems or telling him or her what to do.
 - Reassure your loved one that you care about him or her no matter what.

For Family and Friends

- Respect your loved one's wishes.
 - Allow your loved one to make his or her own decisions. It can help him or her to feel in control again. In addition, your loved one may need a lot of time to heal from the traumatic event and may not feel like participating in some activities.
- Maintain routines.
 - This can give you, your family and your loved one a sense of comfort and that some things have returned to normal. For example, if you usually have dinner together every night, stick to that routine if you can.

For Family and Friends

- Suggest sources of help
 - Encourage your loved one to get the help he or she needs – but don't force. You can help your loved one find health-care providers, mental health professionals or a PTSD treatment program. You can also encourage him or her to maintain friendships, stay in touch with other family members or join a self-help group.

For Family and Friends

- Take a break.
 - It is not necessary for you to stay focused on your loved one's trauma at all times. Let him or her decide when to talk about it. At other times, think of ways you can both relax and enjoy each other's company. For example:
 - Plan a special meal (such as a picnic)
 - Go for a walk
 - Get away for a weekend, if possible
 - Watch a favorite TV show
 - Invite friends for a visit

For Family and Friends

- Be kind to yourself, too.
 - It is easy to neglect yourself if you are taking care of others. But to most effectively help others, you need to take care of your own needs first. For example:
 - Eat healthy food and get enough exercise
 - Take time to relax, rest and get enough sleep
 - Keep in touch with friends
 - Do things that you enjoy

Sources of Help and Information

- **Mental Health/Combat Stress Control Units**
 - are mental health professionals working at the site of deployment to help service members who experience combat stress reactions or battle fatigue.
- **Post-deployment Programs**
 - Help identify service members and their families who may have problems upon returning from deployment. They provide mental and physical health screenings, counseling and reintegration training and support. These programs go by different names depending on the military service.

Sources of Help and Information

- Chaplain Corps
 - Are qualified ministers, priest, rabbis or other spiritual leaders serving the military. They provide ministry to service members and their families. They can provide counseling and offer other personal and spiritual help.

Sources of Help and Information

- Department of Veteran Affairs (VA)
 - Provides a variety of programs for veterans, including health care, disability coverage, PTSD treatment programs, counseling and other assistance. You can find out more at www.va.gov

Sources of Help and Information

- Military OneSource: 1-800-342-9647
 - Is a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week counseling service available to anyone who has been deployed or affected by a loved one's deployment. It provides callers with detailed information and counseling at no cost.
 - You can also visit Military OneSource at: www.militaryonesource.com

Sources of Help and Information

- American Red Cross
 - Provides services to both active duty service members and civilian-based service members and their families. These include disaster relief services, counseling, veterans services and reintegration assistance. You can find out more at www.redcross.org.

Sources of Help and Information

- Other resources
 - Include civilian mental health agencies and clinics, private health-care providers, mental health counselors and self-help groups.

You can manage PTSD or other Combat-Related Stress Reactions

- Taking steps to manage traumatic stress puts you in control.
 - Remember to:
 - Get the support you need by asking for help from your health-care provider, mental health profession, friends and family
 - Take any medications as prescribed, even if you are feeling better
 - Help yourself by learning to relax, managing anger, reconnecting with your spirituality, and avoiding alcohol and other drugs
 - Enjoy life in the here and now by staying connected to loved ones and making healthy choices

By getting treatment and support, you can live a full and satisfying life.

Information in this presentation,
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Channing Bete Company, Inc.

One Community Place

South Deerfield, MA 01373

1 – 800 – 628 - 7733

Your Wing Family Readiness Office

- Heidi Bearden
 - Wing Family Program Coordinator
 - Office: 817-852-3558
 - Cell: 817-822-0110

Combat-Related Stress Reactions



Questions?

Thank You!