



# **The Invisible Wounds**

## **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury**

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# Overview



- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) definition and relevant factors
- Symptoms and treatment
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) – definition and cause
- Symptoms and prevention

Definition and Relevant Factors

# POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

# PTSD



- 50-60% of everyone will be exposed to a traumatic event in their lifetime.
  - Of that number, half will be exposed to multiple events
  - However, most WILL NOT develop PTSD

# What Is PTSD?



- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can occur after you have been through a traumatic event.
- During this type of event, you think that your life or the life of others is in danger.
- After the event, you may feel confused, scared, and/or angry.
- If these feelings do not go away or get worse, you may develop PTSD.

# How does PTSD develop?



- Strong emotions caused by the event create changes in the brain that may result in PTSD.
- Most people experience a natural reduction in symptoms in 1-3 months.
- Recovery continues at a slower rate in the subsequent 9 months.

# Factors in developing PTSD



**It isn't clear why some people develop PTSD and others don't. Some factors include:**

- How intense the trauma was
- How long it lasted
- How close you were to the event
- If you lost someone you were close to or you were hurt
- How strong your reaction was
- How much you felt in control of the events
- How much help and support you got after the event
- History of other trauma

# Most people with PTSD get better.



- 1 out of 3 people with PTSD may continue to have symptoms.
- Even if you continue to have symptoms, you can learn to **MANAGE** your symptoms.



PTSD

# SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENT

# PTSD Symptoms



- Four Types of Symptoms
  1. Reliving the event (also called re-experiencing)
  2. Avoiding reminders
  3. Feeling numb
  4. Feeling on edge

# 1. Reliving the Event



Experiencing the event again—often with the same fear and shock. This is called a flashback.

Triggers may include:

- Loud noises, such as hearing a car backfire
- Seeing a traffic accident
- Certain smells or sounds which remind you of a place or event
- Watching a news report

## 2. Avoiding reminders



- Staying away from places or experiences that bring back memories of the traumatic event
- Avoiding talking or thinking about the event

# 3. Feeling Numb



- Lack of positive or loving feelings toward other people
- Avoiding relationships
- Loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy
- Forgetting about parts of the traumatic event or not being able to talk about them

## 4. Feeling on edge

- Getting easily annoyed or angry
- Feeling jittery
- Overreacting when startled
- Always on alert for danger
- Difficulty sleeping
- Trouble concentrating

# Other Common Problems



- Drinking or drug problems
- Feelings of hopelessness, shame, or despair
- Employment problems
- Relationship problems including divorce and violence
- Physical symptoms

# Can PTSD be treated?



- When you have PTSD, dealing with the past can be hard. Instead of telling others how you feel, you may keep your feelings bottled up.
- Treatment can help. You can learn to manage your symptoms.
- The key to successful treatment is early identification.



# What else can I do?



- Seek support
  - Talk to friends, family, or others who had similar experiences.
- Actively take care of yourself
  - Healthy eating, exercise, rest, social time, spiritual time, and limiting alcohol use can help.
- Let someone know if you need help or support
  - You do not need to go through this alone.

Definition and Cause

# TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI)

# TBI—What is it?



- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is caused by a blow or jolt to the head, or a penetrating injury that disrupts normal function of the brain.
- Not all blows or jolts to the head result in a diagnosis of TBI.

# To be diagnosed with TBI, one of the following must have occurred:



- Any period of loss of consciousness (LOC)
- Any memory loss
- Any alteration of memory state at the time (dazed, confused)
- Focal neurological deficits (a problem in nerve function that affects a specific location or specific function)

# Information on TBI



- Brain injuries do not heal like other injuries and no two brain injuries are alike.
- Symptoms may appear right away or may not be present for days or weeks after the injury.

# Causes of TBI



- Direct Contact – incidents where the head hits an immovable object (head stops, brain doesn't)
- Head motion (i.e. motor vehicle accidents)
- Over pressurization – blasts, explosive munitions, RPGs. Blasts are the leading cause of TBI for active duty military personnel in war zones.
- Penetration – bullets, fragments

TBI

# SYMPTOMS AND PREVENTION

# Symptoms



- Constant headaches – #1 complaint
- Confusion
- Light headedness or dizziness
- Changes in mood or behavior
- Trouble remembering or concentrating
- Repeated nausea or vomiting
- Problems with seeing or hearing



# Mild TBI



- Found in 80% of all cases (Concussion – you WILL get better)
- Imaging normal
- Brief LOC (0-30 minutes; 0-1 day amnesia)
- Usually managed in theater
- Usually doesn't require extensive rehabilitation
- Return to duty varies
- At risk for disciplinary issues; changes in work performance and family distress

# Moderate TBI



- Found in 18% of all cases
- Imaging normal or abnormal
- LOC 30 minutes to 24 hours; 1-7+ days of amnesia
- Usually medically evacuated from theater
- Less intensive rehabilitation needed

# Severe TBI



- Found in 2% of all cases
- Imaging abnormal
- LOC is 24 hours or more
- Medically evacuated
- Intensive rehabilitation needed

# Who is at the highest risk for TBI?



- Everyone is at risk for having TBI. However, recent data shows that:
  - Males are twice as likely as females to sustain a TBI.
  - The two groups at highest risk are 0-4 year olds and 15-19 year olds.
  - Certain military duties (i.e. paratroopers) increase the risk for sustaining a TBI.

# Long Term Consequences



- Thinking – memory and reasoning
- Sensation – touch, taste, and smell
- Language – communication, expression, and understanding
- Emotion – depression, anxiety, personality changes, aggression, risk-taking, acting out, and social inappropriateness

# How can TBI be prevented?



- Seat belts
- Child safety seats
- Helmets – motorcycle, bicycle, snowboarding, etc.
- Protective equipment
- Not returning to play (sports) with a suspected TBI or concussion until you have been evaluated by an appropriate healthcare professional and given permission to return

# What to do if you or someone you know may have PTSD or TBI



- Speak with a professional
- Be supportive or ask for support
- Be informed of triggers and coping strategies

# What else can I do?



- Seek support
  - Talk to friends, family, and others who have had similar experiences.
- Actively take care of yourself
  - Encompass healthy eating, exercise, rest, social time, spiritual time, and limited alcohol use into your life.
- Let someone know if you need help or support
  - You do not need to go through this alone.



# Questions?



# References



- <http://dvbic.org> Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center
- <http://www.oefoif.va.gov> United States Department of Veterans Affairs
- [www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com) Military One Source

# Where to Seek Help



- Airman & Family Readiness Office: 716-236-3411
- Chaplain Office: 716-236-2395
- Commander/Supervisor
- Veterans' Crisis Line, 24/7 800-273-TALK (8255), option 1
- Director of Psychological Health Mobile: 716-534-4209
- Military & Family Life Consultant
- Physician
- VA/Vet Center 716-862-7350
- [www.MilitaryOneSource.com](http://www.MilitaryOneSource.com) 800-342-9647 (24/7)
- [www.WingmanProject.org](http://www.WingmanProject.org)

# Contact



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