



## PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome

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## Statistics

60% of men have a major trauma in their lifetime  
5% develop PTSD

50% of women have a major trauma  
10% develop PTSD

30% Viet Nam veterans  
10% Gulf War veterans  
11-20% OEF/OIF veterans  
7-8% Americans at some time in their lives



## PTSD in veterans

Anger problems are significant  
Sudden rage out of proportion to the stimulus, or no stimulus  
Road rage, physical fights  
Can also manifest as chronic irritability

Nightmares can be severe, violent  
May not remember but will awaken suddenly  
May cause vet to try to avoid sleep



## PTSD in veterans, cont

Isolation from friends, loved ones common  
Problems with concentration, memory, follow-through  
May partake of high-risk behaviors (particularly younger vets)  
Significantly more likely to abuse alcohol/drugs  
Survivor's guilt, sadness, depression with suicidal features  
May be resistant to treatment (warrior culture)



## PTSD & alcohol abuse

Increases: emotional numbing, social isolation, irritability & anger, depression, hyper-vigilance

Nightmare/intrusive memories: ↓ while under the influence but ↑ during withdrawal and periods of abstinence

Flashbacks: can ↑ while under the influence and may be resistant to re-orientation to reality



## PTSD in the ER/hospital setting

Acknowledge the emotion of the situation

*"I can see that being in the hospital is difficult for you."*

Keep things in the 'here and now'

*"You are no longer in Iraq, you are in Montana now."*

Use physical surroundings to orient if panicked/disoriented

*"Do you feel the floor? See the chair? Hear my voice?"*

Stress non-harm and safety

*"No one here wants to cause you harm. You are safe here."*



## PTSD in the ER/hospital setting

Assist with slowing any rapid breathing before attempting to interview

Stay in control, speak in calm, easy tones

Ask questions *one* at a time; *wait* for the answer

Anticipate feelings of claustrophobia, avoid very dark rooms

Try to establish something the veteran feels they can control, no matter how small

Wake up sleeping veterans by calling their names

Touch *only* the vet's feet, *not* the arms or shoulders  
Gently shake the *foot* of the bed



## Treatment - general

Multi-modal approach works best

Group and individual therapy

Medications

*\*Most effective if combined, not as effective if just one is used*

If substance dependence is present, this must be treated first if PTSD treatment is to be effective – many are resistant

Most perceive that they use substances to calm symptoms

Family and/or marriage therapy can also be helpful, as can peer support such as Vet-to-Vet groups

### Treatment - medications

First line med: SSRI, then symptom-specific

Nightmares: prazosin (Minipres), clonidine, quetiapine

Anger, fear of hurting others: atypical such as risperidone, sometimes mood stabilizer such as depakote

Insomnia: zolpidem, trazadone, amitriptyline

Anxiety: benzodiazepines only recommended for very short specific periods of time

### Treatment- suicide prevention

#### Suicidality

Passive – no real plan or intent, but thoughts of dying, or not waking up

Active – with a plan; OD, crashing car, shooting self most common

Intent – sometimes situation or date driven

“if this isn't resolved by x-date, I will kill myself”

Attempt – loads the gun; hoards pills; purchases lethal means are considered attempts, in addition to actually taking pills, etc.

Number 1 preventative step is REMOVE LETHAL MEANS!!

Can be difficult when guns are involved

May be able to negotiate having a trusted person hold guns

May be able to negotiate removing the ammunition

If history of plan/intent/gesture with meds may need to have a trusted person dispense, or only fill short prescriptions, i.e., 14 days

### References

National Center for PTSD, [www.ptsd.va.gov/public](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public)

American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress,  
[www.aeets.org](http://www.aeets.org)

Medline Plus, [www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/PTSD](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/PTSD)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Association,  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

