

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder And Veterans

What Is PTSD?

The Veterans Administration defines Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as *a mental health problem that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event, like combat, a natural disaster, a car accident, or sexual assault*. PTSD is not exclusively a military issue, although combat-related PTSD is one of its most prevalent forms. One thing to remember is that PTSD is not the same for everyone. Two people who experience the same trauma may have different reactions to it.

How Many Veterans Are Diagnosed With PTSD?

The term PTSD made its first appearance in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) in 1980. Before that name, however, it had different names, especially in the military. Shell shock, war neurosis, or even the derogatory terms “yellow” or “yellow-bellied”.

According to the VA, PTSD numbers for veterans are broken down as follows:

- For Operation Enduring Freedom / Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans, 11-20% are diagnosed with PTSD any given year.
- For Desert Storm veterans, 12% are diagnosed with PTSD in a given year.
- 15% of Vietnam veterans were diagnosed with PTSD when the most recent study was done, in the late 1980s. It's estimated that 30% of all Vietnam veterans have had PTSD in their lifetime.

Records are not kept on PTSD from before the Vietnam era.

What Are Some Signs Of PTSD?

PTSD can manifest differently in different people. Most often, however, it involves:

- Recurring, unwanted memories or thoughts about the traumatic event(s) in the past.
- Reliving the traumatic event(s), called a flashback.
- Severe emotional distress and physical reactions to something that reminds you of the trauma event(s).

People who are experiencing PTSD might have changes in their mood, specifically:

- Erratic mood swings
- Negative thoughts of themselves or others
- Hopelessness
- Memory problems, including not remembering specific parts of the traumatic event(s)
- Feeling detached or numb
- Difficulty maintaining close relationships

Where Can I Get Help For My PTSD?

If you're experiencing a PTSD crisis, you can call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. You can also call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or en español 1-888-628-9454. You can contact the Veteran Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, press 1 or you can text 838255. There is also a Veteran Crisis Online Chat [here](#).

If you would like to find help for your PTSD but it's not an emergency situation, you can contact your local Veteran Administration Medical Center. Every VA Medical Center offers PTSD treatment, and many centers across the nation provide specialized PTSD treatment programs.

VA also has specialized treatment for women with mental health issues. Contact your local VA and see their Women Veterans Program Manager, the advocate for women's care at every Medical Center.