



## Start the Conversation: *Information for Veterans Dealing With Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*

If you experienced severe trauma or a life-threatening event before, during, or after service, you may have developed symptoms of extreme stress — commonly known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

### **RECOGNIZING SYMPTOMS OF PTSD IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD FEELING BETTER**

Veterans with PTSD experience a variety of symptoms, some of which may be difficult for others to detect. Symptoms can occur immediately after a specific event or can surface weeks, months, or even years later. Learning to recognize these symptoms is the first step to feeling better.

Learning to recognize the symptoms of PTSD is the first step to feeling better.

### **What factors can increase the risk for PTSD?**

- ▶ The intensity of the trauma
- ▶ Being hurt or losing a loved one
- ▶ Remaining physically close to the site of the traumatic event
- ▶ Feeling as if you were not in control
- ▶ Having no or little support after the event

### **Some of the most common symptoms of PTSD include:**

- ▶ Recurring memories or nightmares of certain events
- ▶ Sleeplessness
- ▶ Loss of interest in things you used to enjoy
- ▶ Feeling numb
- ▶ Anger and irritability



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**It's not just the symptoms of PTSD that disrupt your life; it's also how you react to them. You may:**

- ▶ Frequently avoid places or things that remind you of what happened
- ▶ Turn to drinking or using drugs to numb your feelings
- ▶ Consider harming yourself or others
- ▶ Pull away from other people and become isolated

### **WARNING SIGNS OF A CRISIS**

Symptoms of PTSD do not always lead to a crisis — but if left unchecked, they could become a serious issue over time.

*Learn to recognize these warning signs of a mental health crisis. If you notice any of the following, get help immediately or encourage your Veteran to do so:*

- ▶ Engaging in self-destructive behavior, such as drug abuse or reckless use of weapons
- ▶ Thinking about hurting or killing oneself
- ▶ Looking for ways or having a set plan in place to kill oneself
- ▶ Talking about death, dying, or suicide
- ▶ Saying final goodbyes to friends and family
- ▶ Putting personal affairs in order or giving away possessions

### **TREATMENT FOR PTSD WORKS**

The two main types of treatment are talk therapy and medication. Research shows that talk therapy, such as prolonged exposure therapy or cognitive processing therapy, can help Veterans with PTSD. Likewise, medications, such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), have been shown to be effective in reducing PTSD symptoms. Some individuals experience benefits from combining these two types of treatment.

These treatments can produce positive and meaningful changes in your symptoms and quality of life. They can help you understand and change how you think about your trauma — and change how you react to stressful memories.

Be patient and persistent. You may need to work with your doctor or therapist to try different types of treatment before finding what works most effectively to treat your PTSD symptoms. Also, PTSD treatment has improved quite a bit over the years — so if you tried talk therapy or medication in the past and still have symptoms, it would be good to try again.

Veterans can also consider contacting their family doctor, who may know them well and be able to offer support, guidance, and appropriate referrals during a crisis. Local mental health professionals, such as a therapist, counselor, or spiritual or religious adviser, can provide additional support.

**Treatment works.  
Every day, Veterans with PTSD get better.**

It's important that you talk to someone right away if you have thoughts of harming yourself, death, or suicide. You can always contact the **Veterans Crisis Line** by calling **1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1**, using the online chat, or **texting to 838255**. These services provide free, **confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.**

**For additional information and resources to help a Veteran you're concerned about, visit *Start the Conversation: New Tools for Veteran Suicide Prevention* at [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/starttheconversation](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/starttheconversation)**