

Resources and “self test” for returning veterans and their families.

(Source: American Anxiety Disorders Association).

If you are a returning veteran or a family member of a returning veteran I would strongly encourage you to take the self-test below. The stigma that is attached to what I call the invisible wound is unfounded. Unfortunately we live in a society that does not acknowledge the deep wounds that can't be seen. But this is changing as rapidly as the numbers of people with PTSD are increasing.

“Posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, is a serious potentially debilitating condition that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a natural disaster, serious accident, terrorist incident, sudden death of a loved one, war, violent personal assault such as rape, or other life-threatening events. Most people who experience such events recover from them, but people with PTSD continue to be severely depressed and anxious for months or even years following the event. They frequently relive the event through flashbacks and nightmares. Relaxing, concentrating, or sleeping may become difficult, and they often feel detached or estranged from others.

Posttraumatic stress disorder is characterized by three main types of symptoms:

- * Re-experiencing the trauma through intrusive distressing recollections of the event, flashbacks, and nightmares.
- * Emotional numbness and avoidance of places, people, and activities that are reminders of the trauma.
- * Increased arousal such as difficulty sleeping and concentrating, feeling jumpy, and being easily irritated and angered.

PTSD is diagnosed after a person experiences symptoms for at least one month following a traumatic event. However symptoms may not appear until several months or even years later.

Women are twice as likely to develop posttraumatic stress disorder as men, and children can also develop it. PTSD often

occurs with depression, substance abuse, or other anxiety disorders.

Fast Facts About PTSD

7.7 million Americans age 18 and older have PTSD.

PTSD can develop after a traumatic event such as a sexual or physical assault, witnessing a death, the unexpected death of a loved one, natural disaster, or a terrorist attack.

Sixty-seven percent of people exposed to mass violence have been shown to develop PTSD, a higher rate than those exposed to natural disasters or other types of traumatic events.

People who have experienced previous traumatic events run a higher risk of developing PTSD.

Treatment of PTSD can include cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), group therapy, exposure therapy, and medication."

Take the self-test for posttraumatic stress disorder below.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER SELF-TEST

If you suspect that you might suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, complete the following self-test by checking the "yes or "no" boxes next to each question, print out the test and show the results to your health care professional.

HOW CAN I TELL IF IT'S PTSD?

Yes or No?

Yes No Have you experienced or witnessed a life-threatening event that caused intense fear, helplessness or horror?

Do you re-experience the event in at least one of the following ways?

Yes No Repeated, distressing memories and/or dreams?

Yes No Acting or feeling as if the event were happening again (flashbacks or a sense of reliving it)?

Yes No Intense physical and/or emotional distress when you are exposed to things that remind you of the event?

Do you avoid reminders of the event and feel numb, compared to the way you felt before, in three or more of the following ways:

Yes No Avoiding thoughts, feelings, or conversations about it?

Yes No Avoiding activities, places, or people who remind you of it?

Yes No Blanking on important parts of it?

Yes No Losing interest in significant activities of your life?

Yes No Feeling detached from other people?

Yes No Feeling your range of emotions is restricted?

Yes No Sensing that your future has shrunk (for example, you don't expect to have a career, marriage, children, or a normal life span)?

Are you troubled by two or more of the following:

Yes No Problems sleeping?

Yes No Irritability or outbursts of anger?

Yes No Problems concentrating?

Yes No Feeling "on guard"?

Yes No An exaggerated startle response?

Having more than one illness at the same time can make it difficult to diagnosis and treat the different conditions. Illnesses that sometimes complicate an anxiety disorder such as posttraumatic stress disorder include depression and substance abuse. With this in mind, please take a minute to answer the following questions:

Yes No Have you experienced changes in sleeping or eating habits?

More days than not, do you feel:

Yes No Sad or depressed?

Yes No Disinterested in life?

Yes No Worthless or guilty?

During the last year, has the use of alcohol or drugs:

Yes No Resulted in your failure to fulfill responsibilities with work, school, or family?

Yes No Placed you in a dangerous situation, such as driving a car under the influence?

Yes No Gotten you arrested?

Yes No Continued despite causing problems for you and/or your loved ones?

Reference:

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition. Washington, DC, American Psychiatric Association, 1994.

If you or someone you know would like more information on posttraumatic stress disorder, please go to the ADAA resource page on this topic.

<http://www.adaa.org/GettingHelp/AnxietyDisorders/PTSD.asp>