



PTSD Initiative

Research to restore lives

PTSD:
*An Injury of
Mind and Body*

Managing the **Physical**
and **Psychological**
Symptoms of **PTSD**



GALLIPOLI
MEDICAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Remembrance through research



RETURNED & SERVICES
LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA

QUEENSLAND BRANCH

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT MORE THAN **1,000,000**
AUSTRALIANS WILL SUFFER FROM POSTTRAUMATIC
STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)- ABOUT **1 IN 20** OF US.

THE PREVALENCE AMONG VETERANS IS MUCH HIGHER.

PTSD IS A DEBILITATING PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDER
THAT DEVELOPS FOLLOWING **EXPOSURE TO A**
TRAUMATIC EVENT. IT CAN **SEVERELY AFFECT YOUR**
QUALITY OF LIFE AND HAVE NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON
YOUR **RELATIONSHIPS, FRIENDSHIPS, SOCIAL** AND
VOCATIONAL FUNCTION AS WELL AS YOUR
PHYSICAL HEALTH.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS WORKBOOK IS TO **HELP** YOU
BETTER UNDERSTAND THE **PSYCHOLOGICAL** AND
PHYSICAL HEALTH ISSUES YOU MAY BE EXPERIENCING
AND **CONNECT YOU** WITH SERVICES AND RESOURCES
THAT CAN **HELP WITH RECOVERY**.



The PTSD Initiative

In 2013, the Gallipoli Medical Research Foundation (GMRF) and RSL (Queensland Branch) commenced an ambitious project to help veterans and their families. The PTSD Initiative was a world-first research project investigating the physical and psychological toll of PTSD in Vietnam veterans.

This research found that veterans with a diagnosis of PTSD displayed long-term poor health outcomes including heart disease, gastric complaints and sleep disorders.

We have translated this research into clinical practice with an education program to help general practitioners and other healthcare professionals better identify the symptoms of PTSD for veterans and the one in 20 Australians who suffer from this condition.

Health care professionals earn Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points when they complete the education program available at www.thinkgp.com.au/gmrf

Help us spread the word by mentioning this education to your GP and other healthcare providers.

Health check



Take a minute to think about your health. Do you suffer any of the following physical symptoms?

Review these lists ahead of your next GP appointment.

- Chest pains
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Light-headedness
- Poor appetite
- Reduced exercise tolerance
- Constant fatigue
- Abdominal discomfort
- Constipation or diarrhoea
- Reflux or indigestion
- Sleep difficulties

Do you suffer any other physical symptoms?.....
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Do you suffer any of the following psychological symptoms?

- Frequent nightmares
- Anger and irritability
- Lack of interest in activities you once enjoyed
- Low mood
- Feelings of anxiety
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep

Do you suffer any other psychological symptoms?.....
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Know the warning signs



It can be helpful to understand the warning signs so you know when to reach out for help from a mate, your partner or family.

Some of the core signs of PTSD are:

- Disturbing memories or nightmares about past traumatic experiences
- Avoiding thoughts, feelings or reminders of past traumatic experiences
- Changes in mood including increased anger, lack of interest in activities, and emotional numbness
- Hypervigilance, concentration difficulties and sleep disturbance
- Long-term physical health problems including gastric complaints and sleep disorders.

The stressors of life can trigger or exacerbate a mental health condition.

Are you experiencing stress with any of the following?

- Relationship issues
- Family problems
- Difficulties at work
- Financial demands
- Living arrangements
- Physical/or mental health difficulties

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Heart health



The PTSD Initiative identified that participants with PTSD were almost four times more likely to have suffered a heart attack in the past.

How can your GP help?



1. Review any concerning symptoms with you and regularly check your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
2. If necessary, provide a referral for further diagnostic tests for any symptoms that require further analysis and/or specialist support.

Healthy heart tips

These heart health tips may help keep your heart healthy.

- Follow a Mediterranean diet and eat vegetables, fruit and yoghurt every day, less meat, cheese in moderation and two servings per week of legumes and oily fish.
- For optimum heart health, do not consume more than one to two standard drinks per day and have a couple of alcohol-free days per week.
- Exercise regularly. Even incidental exercise is better than nothing.
- Quit smoking. Talk to your GP or pharmacist about options to help you quit.

See your GP annually (at minimum) to check your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

The gastrointestinal system



The PTSD Initiative identified that participants with PTSD had increased risk of gastrointestinal symptoms including irritable bowel syndrome and its associated symptoms of constipation and diarrhoea, stomach ulcers, and reflux. This may be due to the elevated stress response seen in PTSD and the inflammatory response associated with this stress.

How can your GP help?



1. Review any concerning symptoms with you and discuss appropriate action including medication.
2. If necessary, provide a referral for further diagnostic testing to determine if there is a specific condition you are experiencing.

Healthy gut tips

PTSD can include high arousal levels, with hypervigilance and alertness contributing to high baseline levels of stress and tension. The following strategies could help you function at a more sustainable arousal level.

- Practice meditation or a mindfulness-based exercise such as yoga, tai-chi or martial arts.
- Stress management techniques could help you decrease the intensity of arousal when feeling anxious. These include deep abdominal breathing to reduce physiological anxiety, challenging unhelpful thoughts and developing a healthy balance between positive and negative thinking.
- A balanced diet and good nutrition is important not just for good gut health but for overall health. Consider following a real Mediterranean diet and limit your intake of fat, salt, sugar and alcohol.

Your liver and alcohol



The PTSD Initiative identified that participants with PTSD had an increased risk of abnormal liver texture, suggestive of liver disease, and had four times higher risk of fatty liver. Alcohol dependence was higher in the veterans with PTSD.

How can your GP help?



1. Review your alcohol intake with you and outline safe drinking levels.
2. If indicated, your GP may provide a specialist referral for an assessment of your liver function.

Healthy liver tips

- Drink alcohol within safe limits using the recommended safe drinking guidelines at www.alcohol.gov.au
- Seek out both professional and personal support. Are there any peer mentors in your life who have struggled with similar difficulties and would be a good source of information and support?

The respiratory system



The PTSD Initiative identified that participants with PTSD had decreased lung function. Two common symptoms are wheezing and shortness of breath. Wheezing is a high-pitched whistling sound that occurs when you breathe through narrowed airways. Shortness of breath is more obvious during increased activity when more oxygen is required and you have difficulty breathing deeply.

How can your GP help?



1. Review any concerning symptoms with you and help identify the underlying cause.
2. If indicated, the GP may order investigations to assess your respiratory health and make recommendations for appropriate exercise reconditioning programs.

Tips to breathe easier

For healthy lung function you need to follow a healthy lifestyle that includes not smoking, engaging in regular exercise and eating a balanced diet.

- Get involved in social activities with friends and family that promote body movement in a fun and supportive environment.
- Incorporate activities like walking the dog and gardening into your daily routine.
- Actively seek out information on breathing and exercise techniques, respiratory medications, and (if required) oxygen therapy.

Sleep



A good night's rest comes naturally for most people, but for sufferers of PTSD there are a number of serious sleep conditions that can put overall health at risk.

The PTSD Initiative identified that PTSD sufferers were three times more likely to suffer from obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) and other unusual sleep behaviours (like acting out dreams and vocalisation during sleep), and restless leg syndrome.

Do you experience any of the following symptoms?

- Consistently waking up during the night
- Calling out during the night
- Uncomfortable and unpleasant sensations in the legs that result in continual movement and tossing and turning
- Stop breathing and then start suddenly (snoring)
- Significant daytime fatigue
- Consistently waking up unrefreshed

How can your GP help?



1. Review any concerning symptoms with you and help identify the underlying cause.
2. If indicated, the GP may arrange a sleep study or refer to a respiratory specialist.

How to have a good night's sleep

Here are some sleep hygiene rules that may help you develop good sleep patterns.

- Stick to a bedtime routine: Make sure you are feeling sleepy when you go to bed, and don't go to bed too early or too late. As tempting as it is, try to avoid napping during the day.
- Incorporate some relaxation activity before bed, like reading or meditating.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol intake a few hours before sleep.
- Within your capacity, exercise regularly. It is best to exercise in the morning or early in the evening.
- Limit use of devices with screens such as TVs, phones, and tablets before bed. The light from these devices may delay the release of melatonin, a hormone that helps us to sleep.

Summing up

Integrated health care that addresses both psychological and physical health, as well as preventative control of risk factors, is most likely to improve your quality of life.

Your GP can help you manage your physical and psychological health, and identify symptoms associated with PTSD.

Your GP may also suggest involving your family/carer as a source of information and support, and to assess their care requirements.

Acknowledgement

The PTSD Initiative is an initiative of the Gallipoli Medical Research Foundation in partnership with RSL (Queensland Branch). We would like to acknowledge and thank the Vietnam veterans who participated in this study.

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Gallipoli Medical Research Foundation is an approved research institute committed to life-changing medical research. We engage with individuals, businesses, and communities to grow the research of the Gallipoli Medical Research Institute. We focus on translational research with immediate and meaningful impact.

We are proud to be based on the campus of Greenslopes Private Hospital (GPH). The in-kind support we receive from GPH, in combination with the income we derive from our Clinical Trials Unit, pays for our administrative costs. Therefore, 100% of donations we receive go directly to medical research.

If you would like to learn more about the work of the Foundation, visit our website at www.gallipoliiresearch.com.au



Support organisations and resources

There are a range of support organisations that can provide assistance to veterans and their family members. These organisations assist with the practical, social and psychological needs of veterans.

RSL (Queensland Branch)

T: 134 775 (business hours)

W: www.rslqld.org

ESO Directory <https://www.rslqld.org/ESO-Directory>

or contact your local RSL Queensland veteran services officer.

Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service - 24hours/7 days a week

T: 1800 011 046

W: www.vvcs.gov.au

Mates4Mates

T: 1300 4 62837

W: www.mates4mates.org

Mobile apps - At Ease (DVA) have created several mobile apps that can help you build resilience and manage your PTSD symptoms and stress.

W: <http://at-ease.dva.gov.au/veterans/resources/mobile-apps/>

At Ease website: <http://at-ease.dva.gov.au/>

Lifeline - Counselling services for anyone at any time

T: 13 11 14

W: www.lifeline.org.au

Beyond Blue - Information on depression and anxiety

T: 1300 224 636

W: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/get-immediate-support>

Parentline - Confidential telephone counselling support for parents and carers of children

T: 1300 301 300

W: www.parentline.com.au

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