

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), often hidden, could be diagnosed using brain imaging

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Miller for NewsUS Army Col. Michael Roy oversees the virtual Iraq therapy at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., designed to help veterans cope with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Post-traumatic stress disorder, which is now diagnosed with behavioral screenings, may one day be easily identified by certain patterns of brain activity, according to [an article on Cnet.com](#).

The technique uses magnetoencephalography (MEG) to measure magnetic fluctuations in the brain.

[University of Minnesota](#) neuroscience professor [Apostolos Georgopoulos](#), lead researcher of a study, invited 74 military veterans already diagnosed with PTSD and 250 “healthy” volunteers to briefly stare at a dot for the collection of magnetic signals. These signals offered data on each of the study participants’ brains.

The researchers found that the technique let them identify people as either PTSD sufferers or not more than 90% of the time.

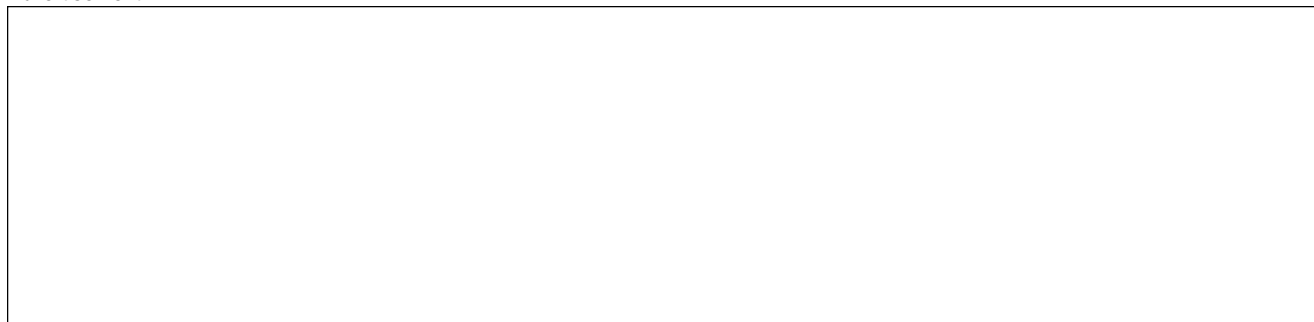
It’s estimated that 1 in 3 soldiers returning from [Iraq](#) and 1 in 5 soldiers returning from [Afghanistan](#) suffers from PTSD. It is considered a “soft” disorder, and many soldiers would rather hide the fact that they suffer from it.

“It’s like depression in that it can be hidden by the sufferer, it can be latent and it can be reactivated,” Georgopoulos told Cnet. “That’s a major issue for the Army, which has to decide whether to redeploy troops who have had it.”

The researchers are hopeful that these findings will override the idea that PTSD is a form of weakness, or that it’s a “bunk disorder,” and hopefully, more soldiers will get tested and treated.

“It is an important and valuable first step in our collective search to find an objective basis for identifying PTSD,” says [Dr. Charles Marmor](#), professor and chair of the department of psychiatry at [NYU Langone Medical Center](#). “We will never be able to perform high-level care on our veterans unless we have an objective test to diagnose PTSD.”

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He said it's part of a broader effort to develop lab tests for psychiatric problems. "If you go to the doctor with a sore throat, they do blood test and a throat culture so there is laboratory confirmation," Marmar says. "But with PTSD, there is no specific and reliable diagnostic test that is objective."

[Dr. Eric Braverman](#), clinical assistant professor of integrative medicine at [New York Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center](#), says that this test offers a way to confirm a PTSD diagnosis.

"And it demonstrates in more subtle fashion that people with PTSD are showing it in an organ, in this case the brain, just as people with heart problems can be diagnosed by what their heart looks like," he said.

Researchers now hope to evaluate 500 vets and 500 civilians to test their findings.

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