

Health 

New research shows how PTSD affects the body

Thursday, June 16, 2011

TAGS: [iraq war](#), [afghanistan war](#), [health](#), [cheryl jennings](#)

[Comment Now](#) [Email](#) [Print](#) [Report a typo](#) 

SAN FRANCISCO (KGO) -- New research on post traumatic stress disorder will be released next week at a conference hosted by the Veteran's Health Research Institute in San Francisco. ABC7 got a preview of the studies, which suggest that PTSD can dramatically affect a person's health as they age.

The conference is called "Preparing For the Future of Veterans Health" and the early research indicates that PTSD affects the body as well as the brain.

Researchers are learning that the psychological wounds of war, known as post traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD have a devastating biological impact.

"Theme of this conference is that we're thinking about the aging veteran," said Dr. Thomas Neylan.

Neylan, the head of PTSD research at the San Francisco Veteran's Administration, showed one area of the brain, that's affected by PTSD. It's called the hippocampus. It looks like a little jelly roll and is responsible for memory.

"There are different regions of the hippocampus and the interesting thing is that some of these regions are very sensitive to stress," said Neylan.

High resolution brain scans show that people with PTSD have a smaller hippocampus, by 11 percent on average.

"This is the area that we found is smaller in people with PTSD," said Neylan.

Some other key findings to be released at the conference, suggest that older PTSD veterans were almost twice as likely to develop dementia, they have two to three times higher risk of heart disease, and have a higher risk of death after surgery.

But, studies show the treatment of PTSD gives veterans a fighting chance of regaining good mental and physical health.

"The fact that we're finding an abnormality in an area of the brain where new neurons grow, suggests that it's an area that involves we call plasticity, or flexibility of the brain. We're very excited at the idea that you could actually see a change, a reversal of this hippocampal abnormality," said Neylan.

PTSD affects 15 to 20 percent of military personnel who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. So, the V.A. is hoping that those veterans get treatment, sooner, rather than later, to head off those long term health problems.

The conference is next week. The goal of the research at the San Francisco V.A. medical center is to find ways to diagnose PTSD through physical markers, as opposed to just psychological findings.

(Copyright ©2011 KGO-TV/DT. All Rights Reserved.)

[Get more Health »](#)

TAGS: [iraq war](#), [afghanistan war](#), [health](#), [cheryl jennings](#)

[Comment Now](#) [Email](#) [Print](#) [Report a typo](#) 

[Recommend](#)  135 people recommend this. Be the first of your friends.

