

The War at Home: What Can I Do if I Think I Have PTSD?

Many treatments available for those suffering

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- WALA Staff Report 

If you think you have PTSD, it's important to get treatment. Treatment can work, and early treatment may help reduce long-term symptoms.

If you think you have PTSD:

- Talk to your family doctor.
- Talk to a mental health professional, such as a therapist.
- If you're a veteran, contact your local VA hospital or Vet Center.
- Talk to a close friend or family member. He or she may be able to support you and find you help.
- Talk to a religious leader.
- Fill out a PTSD screen and take it with you to the doctor. While this online PTSD screen asks about stressful military experiences, you can also answer the questions as they would apply to any other kind of trauma.
- Learn more about talking to your doctor about trauma .

Many people who might need assistance with something like the symptoms of PTSD are afraid to go for help.

- 1 out of 5 people say they might not get help because of what other people might think.
- 1 out of 3 people say they would not want anyone else to know they were in therapy.

A study of soldiers coming home from Iraq found that only 4 in 10 service members with mental health problems said they would get help. Some of the most common reasons they gave were:

- Worried about what others would think
- Thought it might hurt their military career
- Might be seen as weak

Why seek help?

Here are some of the reasons why you should seek help:

- **Early treatment is better**

Symptoms of PTSD may get worse. Dealing with them now might help stop them from getting worse in the future. Finding out more about what treatments work, where to look for help, and what kind of questions to ask can make it easier to get help and lead to better outcomes.

- **PTSD symptoms can change family life**

PTSD symptoms can get in the way of your family life. You may find that you pull away from loved ones, are not able to get along with people, or that you are angry or even violent. Getting help for your PTSD can help improve your family life.

- **PTSD can be related to other health problems**

PTSD symptoms can worsen physical health problems. For example, a few studies have shown a relationship between PTSD and heart trouble. By getting help for your PTSD, you could also improve your physical health.

- **It may not be PTSD**

Having symptoms of PTSD does not always mean you have PTSD. Some of the symptoms of PTSD are also symptoms for other mental health problems. For example, trouble concentrating or feeling less interested in things you used to enjoy can be symptoms of both depression and PTSD. Since different problems have different treatments, it's important to have your symptoms assessed.

While it may be tempting to identify PTSD in yourself or someone you know, the diagnosis generally is made by a mental health professional. This will usually involve an evaluation by a psychiatrist, psychologist, or clinical social worker specifically trained to assess

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psychological problems.

What you can do?

If you have PTSD or PTSD symptoms, you may feel helpless.

Here are ways, though, that you can help yourself:

- Learn more about PTSD from this website or from other places.
- Talk to your doctor or a chaplain or other religious leader.
- Go for a PTSD evaluation by a mental health professional specifically trained to assess psychological problems.

If you do not want to be evaluated, but feel you have symptoms of PTSD, you may choose "watchful waiting." Watchful waiting means taking a wait-and-see approach.

- If you get better on your own, you won't need treatment.
- If your symptoms do not get better after 3 months, and they are either causing you distress or are getting in the way of your work or home life, talk with a health professional.

In a few cases, your symptoms may be so severe that you need immediate help. Call 911 or other emergency services immediately if you think that you cannot keep from hurting yourself or someone else.

What treatments are available?

Today, there are good treatments available for PTSD. When you have PTSD dealing with the past can be hard. Instead of telling others how you feel, you may keep your feelings bottled up. But talking with a therapist can help you get better.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) appears to be the most effective type of counseling for PTSD. There are different types of cognitive behavioral therapies such as cognitive therapy and exposure therapy. There is also a similar kind of therapy called eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) that is used for PTSD. Medications have also been shown to be effective. A type of drug known as a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI), which is also used for depression, is effective for PTSD.

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