



# A GUIDE TO BEHAVIORAL & MENTAL HEALTH

[www.helmetstohardhats.org](http://www.helmetstohardhats.org)

866-741-6210

# FOR IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION CALL 911

If you are concerned about the safety and well-being of a Veteran, call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1. You can also use the Veterans Crisis Line online chat or send a text message to 838255. These services provide free, confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text.

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*The resources listed at the end of this publication are also for informational purposes, and are not intended as an endorsement of any particular organization, services or publications.*

# TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) can occur when something outside the body hits the head with significant force or causes the head to forcefully and rapidly move. There are many causes of TBI, including when the head hits the windshield during a car accident, an impact from a fall, sports or other recreational activities, or trauma from a nearby blast or explosion during military service. Whatever the cause, TBI can affect the ability to think, control emotions, walk, or speak, along with their senses of sight or hearing.

TBI can be mild to severe. Mild injuries are associated with brief changes in or loss of consciousness. Severe injuries involve longer periods of unconsciousness and memory loss around the event. Moderate and severe instances of TBI may be easier to diagnose.

TBI can affect many areas of a person's life, including physical functions, thinking abilities, and behaviors. These effects sometimes cause other difficulties such as sleeping problems, depression, and anxiety.

Some of the symptoms of TBI can look like emotional or behavioral problems, even though they are actually due to TBI. There are no standard TBI symptoms; the condition can affect people in different ways, and sometimes symptoms change during the recovery process. Some people may recognize TBI symptoms immediately, while for others, these symptoms don't show up right away or can be ignored or minimized at first.

If left untreated, the effects of TBI can affect the way you live your life and the relationships you have with others. Ignoring the symptoms and trying to "tough it out" may make symptoms worse.

The timeline for recovery varies from person to person. People with symptoms of mild TBI may recover over time, and signs may disappear within a few weeks or months. Some moderate to severe TBI symptoms last for a longer period of time and may be permanent.

## What are the common symptoms following a TBI?

### PHYSICAL

- Headache
- Feeling dizzy
- Being tired
- Loss of energy
- Trouble sleeping
- Vision problems
- Feeling bothered by noise and light
- Difficulty speaking
- Trouble hearing or sensitivity to noises
- Change in sense of taste or smell

### COGNITIVE (MENTAL)

- Memory problems
- Trouble staying focused
- Poor judgment and acting without thinking
- Trouble putting thoughts into words
- Difficulty concentrating
- Trouble with attention
- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty making decisions
- Repeating things
- Forgetfulness

### EMOTIONAL (FEELINGS)

- Depression
- Anger outbursts and quick to anger
- Anxiety (fear, worry, or feeling nervous)
- Personality changes

A person who has sustained a TBI is at greater risk for PTSD and depression. PTSD may result from the psychological impact of the same incident that caused the TBI, for example: car crash, fall, blast exposure or blunt trauma to the head.

# POST TRAUMATIC STRESS & STRESS DISORDER

Feeling on edge? Nightmares keep coming back?

Sudden noises make you jump?

You're staying at home more and more.

You may be suffering from Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) or Stress Disorder (PTSD).

It's easy to confuse PTS and PTSD. In addition to sharing similar names, there's considerable overlap in symptoms between the two conditions. However, there are significant differences in symptom intensity, duration and treatment.

PTS can happen to anyone and is a common, normal, and often adaptive response to experiencing a traumatic or stressful event. Almost everyone who experiences a scary situation will show at least a few signs of PTS.

## PTS Symptoms:

Although they can be momentarily intense, symptoms of PTS usually subside a few days after the event and won't cause any prolonged meaningful interference with your life. If you're experiencing PTS, you may notice:

- Heart racing
- Shaky hands
- Body sweats, feeling clammy
- Feeling afraid or nervous
- You avoid certain situations (usually involving the activity related to your traumatic event)
- Bad dreams about the event

PTSD can occur after someone is exposed to a traumatic event such as combat, a terrorist attack, sexual or physical assault, a serious accident, a natural disaster, childhood sexual or physical abuse, or threat of injury or death. PTSD is a clinically significant condition with symptoms lasting more than one month after exposure to a trauma that causes significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning.

Trauma exposure may happen through directly experiencing the event, witnessing the event, or in certain circumstances, learning the details of traumatic events that happened to others. Maybe during the event they felt as if their life or the lives of others were in danger or that they had no control over what was happening. While in the military, they may have witnessed people being injured or dying, or they may have experienced physical harm themselves.

Symptoms of PTSD usually start soon after the traumatic event, but they may not appear until months or years later after returning from deployment. They also may come and go over many years. If the symptoms last longer than four weeks, cause you great distress, or disrupt your work or home life, you might have PTSD.

Some factors can increase the likelihood of a traumatic event leading to PTSD, such as:

- The intensity of the trauma
- Being hurt or losing someone you were close to
- Being physically close to the traumatic event
- Feeling you were not in control
- Having a lack of support after the event

## What are the signs of PTSD?

The following are some of the most common symptoms of PTSD that you or those around you may have noticed:

- Feeling upset by things that remind you of what happened
- Having nightmares, vivid memories, or flashbacks of the event that make you feel like it's happening all over again
- Feeling emotionally cut off from others
- Feeling numb or losing interest in things you used to care about
- Feeling constantly on guard
- Feeling irritated or having angry outbursts
- Having difficulty sleeping
- Having trouble concentrating
- Being jumpy or easily startled
- Having more negative beliefs and feelings

It's not just the symptoms of PTSD but also how you may react to them that can disrupt your life. You may:

- Frequently avoid places or things that remind you of what happened
- Consistently drink or use drugs to numb your feelings
- Consider harming yourself or others
- Start working all the time to occupy your mind
- Pull away from other people and become isolated

## PEOPLE WITH PTSD MAY ALSO FACE OTHER PROBLEMS. THESE INCLUDE:

- Feelings of hopelessness, shame, or despair
- Depression or anxiety
- Physical symptoms or chronic pain
- Employment problems
- Relationship problems, including divorce

# POST TRAUMATIC STRESS & STRESS DISORDER (CONTINUED)

## BEHAVIORS THAT INDICATE PROFESSIONAL INTERVENTION IS NEEDED MAY INCLUDE:

- Drinking or smoking more to reduce anxiety or anger
- Aggressive or nervous driving -- service members who have experienced combat can be especially nervous driving under overpasses and past litter on the roadside
- Being wary of crowds (showing reluctance to go to movie theaters, crowded stores, or nightclubs)
- Avoiding combat-related news or getting angry at the reports

## Will people with PTSD get better?

“Getting better” means different things for different people. There are many different treatment options for PTSD. For many people, these treatments can get rid of symptoms altogether. Others find they have fewer symptoms or feel that their symptoms are less intense. Symptoms don’t have to interfere with your everyday activities, work, and relationships.

### Treatment options for PTSD.

Two types of treatment have been shown to be effective for treating PTSD: counseling and medication. Professional therapy or coun-

seling can help them understand their thoughts and reactions and help them learn techniques to cope with challenging situations. Medications can also be used to help reduce tension or irritability or to improve sleep. These treatments can help them understand and change how they think about their trauma and how they react to stressful memories.

## What can a veteran do if they think they have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

In addition to getting treatment, they can adjust their lifestyle to help relieve PTSD symptoms. For example, talking with other Veterans who have experienced trauma can help them connect with and trust others; exercising can help reduce physical tension; and volunteering can help them reconnect with your community. When they’re ready to talk, they also can let their friends and family know when certain places or activities make them uncomfortable.

It’s still not completely understood why some people who are exposed to traumatic situations develop PTSD while others don’t. What happens after the traumatic event is also important; stress can make PTSD more likely, while social support can make it less likely.

# SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR

People experience emotional and mental health crises in response to a wide range of situations—from difficulties in their personal relationships to the loss of a job. For Veterans, these crises can be heightened by their experiences in military service.

There’s no single cause for suicide. Suicide most often occurs when stressors exceed current coping abilities of someone suffering from a mental health condition. Depression is the most common condition associated with suicide, and it is often undiagnosed or untreated. Conditions like depression, anxiety and substance problems, especially when unaddressed, increase risk for suicide.

***Suicide is a complex problem with many factors contributing to increased risk.***

## Warning Signs:

**Conditions like depression, anxiety and substance problems, especially when unaddressed, increase risk for suicide.**

### SPECIFIC SIGNS INCLUDE:

- Appearing sad or depressed most of the time.
- Clinical depression - deep sadness, loss of interest, trouble sleeping and eating - that doesn’t go away or that continues to get worse.
- Feeling anxious or agitated, or unable to sleep, or sleeping all the time.
- Neglecting personal welfare; deteriorating physical appearance.
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and society.
- Loss of interest in hobbies, work, school, or other things one used to care about.

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# SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR (CONTINUED)

- Frequent and dramatic mood changes.
- Expressing feelings of excessive guilt or shame.
- Feelings of failure or decreased performance.

## PEOPLE WHO ARE CONSIDERING SUICIDE:

- Feel hopeless, helpless, worthless.
- Feel that life is not worth living or see no reason for living.
- Have no sense of a life purpose.
- Have feelings of desperation, and say that there's no solution to their problems.
- Talk about feeling trapped - like there is no way out of a situation.

People who are thinking about ending their lives are often **preoccupied with death or suicide**. They may:

- Talk of a suicide plan or making a serious attempt.
- Frequently talk or think about death, or say things like "It would be better if I wasn't here", or "I want out".
- Talk, write, or draw pictures about death, dying, or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person.
- Talk about suicide in a vague or indirect way, saying things like: "I'm going away on a real long trip"; "You don't have to worry about me anymore"; "I just want to go to sleep and never wake up"; or "Don't worry if you don't see me for a while".

A person who is contemplating ending their life may show behavior that looks as though he or she is "**getting ready**", and do things like:

- Give away prized possessions.
- Put affairs in order, tie up loose ends, and/or make out a will.
- Seek access to firearms, pills, or other means of harming oneself.
- Call or visit family and/or friends as if to say goodbye.

People who are considering suicide may show **dramatic changes in behavior**, such as:

- Performing poorly at work or school.
- Looking as though one has a "death wish" such as tempting fate by taking risks that could lead to death, or driving fast or running red lights..
- Behaving in a reckless and/or impulsive manner..
- Show violent behavior such as punching holes in walls, getting into fights or self-destructive violence; feeling rage or uncontrolled anger or seeking revenge.
- Show a sudden, unexpected switch from being very sad to being very calm or appearing to be happy, as if suddenly everything is okay.

People who are considering suicide may be **experiencing severe loss or potential future loss** that may intensify suicidal thoughts, such as:

- Real or potential loss or break-up of marriage or important relationship.
- Combat-related losses.
- Loss of one's health.
- Loss of job, home, money, status, self-esteem, personal security.
- Being faced with a situation of humiliation or failure, such as loss of status or position due to injury or impending disciplinary actions.

## OTHER WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE RISK MAY INCLUDE:

- Increasing tobacco, alcohol or drug use.
- Signs of self-inflicted injuries, such as cuts, burns, or head banging.
- May be unwilling to "connect" with potential helpers, i.e., counselor, chaplain, etc.

# TREATMENT RESOURCES

## Vet Centers

If they are a combat Veteran, they can bring their DD214 to their local Vet Center and speak with a counselor or therapist — many of whom are Veterans themselves — for free, without an appointment, and regardless of their enrollment status with VA.

[www2.va.gov/directory/guide/vetcenter\\_flash.asp](http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/vetcenter_flash.asp)

## VA Medical Center Facility Locator & PTSD Program Locator

VA provides world-class health care to eligible Veterans. Most Veterans qualify for cost-free health care services, although some Veterans must pay modest copays for health care or prescriptions. Explore their eligibility for health care using VA's Health Benefits Explorer tool and find out more about the treatment options available to them.

**Medical Center Facility Locator** - [www2.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp?isflash=1](http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp?isflash=1)

**PTSD Program Locator** - [www.va.gov/directory/guide/PTSD.asp](http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/PTSD.asp)

## Veterans Crisis Line

Fill in the appropriate ZIP Code at the link below and check the boxes of the programs or topics you are interested in. You can also select the National Resource Directory or the SAMHSA Behavioral Health tab to find additional services.

<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/GetHelp/ResourceLocator.aspx>

## Outreach Center for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury Support

The Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury has established an Outreach Center to provide resources to Veterans and others. The Center can provide personalized information about symptoms and recommend resources in your area.

[www.dcoe.mil/Families/Help.aspx](http://www.dcoe.mil/Families/Help.aspx)

## Postvention Resources

Information and Support After a Suicide Attempt: A Department of Veterans Affairs Resource Guide for Family Members of Veterans Who are Coping with Suicidality

<http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/docs/ResourceGuideFamilyMembers.pdf>

## Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (T.A.P.S.)

<http://www.taps.org/survivors/>

# EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

## ON TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY & POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS

### Understanding PTSD Treatment Booklet

This eight-page booklet explains in detail the various ways to treat PTSD effectively and debunks some myths about treatment

[www.ptsd.va.gov/public/understanding\\_TX/booklet.pdf](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/understanding_TX/booklet.pdf)

### Brainlinemilitary.org – TBI & PTSD

[http://www.brainlinemilitary.org/content/2013/03/tbi-and-ptsd-navigating-the-perfect-storm\\_pageall.html](http://www.brainlinemilitary.org/content/2013/03/tbi-and-ptsd-navigating-the-perfect-storm_pageall.html)

### National Center for PTSD

This website provides information, resources, and practical advice for Veterans, their family and friends, and the public when dealing with trauma.

[www.ptsd.va.gov/public/index.asp](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/index.asp)

[http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/problems/traumatic\\_brain\\_injury\\_and\\_ptsd.asp](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/problems/traumatic_brain_injury_and_ptsd.asp)

### Make the Connection - TBI

<http://maketheconnection.net/conditions/traumatic-brain-injury>

# **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS,  
NATIONAL CENTER FOR PTSD**

[www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

[www.mentalhealth.va.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov)

**DEFENSE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE FOR  
PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND BRAIN INJURY**

[www.dcoe.mil](http://www.dcoe.mil)

**VETERANS CRISIS LINE**

[www.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net)

**BRAINLINEMILITARY**

[http://www.brainlinemilitary.org/  
content/2013/03/tbi-and-ptsd-navigating-  
the-perfect-storm\\_pageall.html](http://www.brainlinemilitary.org/content/2013/03/tbi-and-ptsd-navigating-the-perfect-storm_pageall.html)

**DEFENSE SUICIDE PREVENTION OFFICE**

<http://www.dspo.mil/>

**MAKE THE CONNECTION**

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