

FACTSHEET - THE EFFECTS OF PTSD

Purpose

This Factsheet describes how Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can affect current and former serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) members and their families and outlines how it can be treated.

What is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

PTSD is a psychological condition affecting some people who experience or witness traumatic events such as combat, disasters, serious accidents or violence.

Traumatic events do not affect everyone in the same way. For many people the feelings connected with exposure to trauma decrease over time. However, some people have severe reactions to traumatic event(s) that can continue over time and impact on their quality of life.

How can PTSD affect current and ex-serving ADF members?

Certain ADF personnel may be more likely than the general population to be exposed to one or more significant traumatic events. Although they are trained for operational duties this cannot always prepare them for the psychological impact of events they may experience or witness.

Common symptoms of trauma can include:

- Alcohol and/or drug abuse
- Anger, irritability and/or agitation
- Anxiety or feelings of fearfulness
- Avoiding reminders of the traumatic event(s), or avoiding thinking about the traumatic event(s)
- Always feeling “on high alert” for danger or threats in the environment
- Depression, low mood, or mood swings
- Feeling “numb” or emotionally detached
- Feelings of guilt, including survivor guilt, helplessness, sadness, or shame
- Intrusive memories and feelings, e.g. flashbacks
- Loss of confidence
- Poor concentration, poor memory or confusion
- Physical symptoms including headaches, stomach upsets, rashes, and muscular tension
- A sense that there is no hope for positive things in the future

- Sleeping difficulties including nightmares and troubles falling or staying asleep
- Withdrawing from friends and family

How is PTSD treated?

It is important to always talk with your doctor about the treatment options that are right for you and your circumstances.

Treatment for PTSD usually involves a combination of counselling and lifestyle strategies such as relaxation or exercise. Medication can help reduce high levels of stress, stabilise mood or ease the depression often related to PTSD.

Sometimes, the first signs of PTSD that current and former ADF personnel and their families seek help for can involve difficulties at home. For instance, counselling may firstly focus on strategies to address relationship issues, impacts on family members, managing anger or reducing the use of alcohol or other drugs. This might all occur before specific treatments targeting trauma or PTSD are considered.

How can PTSD affect families?

The impacts of PTSD can affect those who live with a current or former-serving ADF member or who are closest to them such as partners, children and other family members or friends. Support from families can often help recovery. In some cases family members may also benefit from seeking their own support to understand and manage the stressors of living with and supporting someone with PTSD.

What help is available?

Open Arms offers individual, couple and family counselling and group programs to help current and former-serving ADF members and their families understand and address mental health concerns. Open Arms also offers evidence based, gold standard treatments for PTSD. Open Arms counsellors have an understanding of Australian military culture that assists them to deliver specialised support to our clients. If necessary, Open Arms also sometimes refers clients to specialist trauma recovery programs to assist with treating PTSD.

Open Arms also offers group programs that can be helpful for family members and carers of current and former-serving ADF members with PTSD. See the [Open Arms Group Calendar](#) webpage for details on programs in your region.

For access to mental health videos, self-help tools, mobile apps, and advice on how to seek professional help, visit DVA's [At Ease website](http://www.at-ease.dva.gov.au) at www.at-ease.dva.gov.au

Your GP can provide treatment or refer you to a psychologist, psychiatrist or social worker if needed.

Am I eligible for Open Arms?

To find out if you are eligible, or for more information about services available, please contact your nearest Open Arms centre on **1800 011 046***, visit www.Openarms.gov.au.



1800 011 046

GPO Box 9998
Brisbane, QLD 4001

www.openarms.gov.au

More Information

Open Arms - Veterans & Families Counselling Service

Phone: 1800 011 046 *

Email: OPENARMS.COORD@dva.gov.au

Open Arms Website: www.Openarms.gov.au

At Ease Website: www.at-ease.dva.gov.au

DVA General Enquiries

Phone: 1800 555 254 *

Email: GeneralEnquiries@dva.gov.au

DVA Website: www.dva.gov.au

* Calls from pay phones and some mobile phones may incur additional charges.

Disclaimer

The information contained in this Factsheet is general in nature and does not take into account individual circumstances. You should not make important decisions, such as those that affect your financial or lifestyle position on the basis of information contained in this Factsheet. Where you are required to lodge a written claim for a benefit, you must take full responsibility for your decisions prior to the written claim being determined. You should seek confirmation in writing of any oral advice you receive from DVA.