

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

PTSD was first classified as an anxiety disorder and listed in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental and Nervous Disorders (DSM) in 1980. In the past the condition was called “soldiers heart” for Civil War combatants and after World War II was referred to as combat fatigue and “shell shock syndrome” with respect to the emotional condition describing many returning veterans. The condition resurfaced during the Vietnam War era and again in recent times as a growing number of service men and women are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan after experiencing the trauma associated with day to day war conditions. Experts say that 1 in 6 of our current service men and women will develop the condition with women experiencing more severe symptoms than men.

In order to develop PTSD one must experience a trauma outside the realm of ordinary human experience. In addition to combat single causative events can include natural disasters (earthquakes, hurricanes) or violent events such as a physical or sexual assault.

The diagnosis of PTSD includes a cluster of symptoms in 3 categories:

(1) Re-experience symptoms including flashbacks, nightmares and the triggering of the event by stimuli such as a noise or a smell. (2) Avoidance symptoms include psychic numbing, isolation, emotional shut down or withdrawal. (3) Hyper-arousal symptoms include hyper-vigilance or constant monitoring of environment and physical reactions to memories of the event including pounding heartbeat, muscle tension and sweating.

There is evidence to support the cumulative development of PTSD as well including in children who are victims of repeated physical and or sexual trauma over a period of time. It is believed to become more complex and rooted deeper if the trauma occurs at the hands of a loved one or care giver, a person in a position of trust

Treatment options have expanded to include Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) a trauma focused therapy discovered in the 1980's by Francine Shapiro PhD. EMDR works by helping the body to process out traumatic experiences that are stored in the cells of the body memory. Trauma focused cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is also a viable treatment option as is the use of psychotropic medications.

Veterans Administration Hospitals offer treatment and provide inpatient units where vets may spend 3-6 months with others. Sharing a common therapeutic arena and experience with others who've been there is ideal in order to maximize chances of a positive result.

LECSA staff have volunteered time assisting our nation's military and families over the past four years by participating in the Long Island chapter of Soldiers Project a 501C3 not for profit organization established 2004 to provide free psychological support services to military personnel. Any military member who has served since September 11, 2001 is eligible. Free counseling services are available for all family members as well.

Contact LECSA EAP 631-851-1295 or the Soldiers Project 516-284-7531

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