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Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: What You Need to Know

By Heather Hummert

Heather A. Hummert is the wife of a Purple Heart Veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and an advocate for veterans' families; she specializes in PTSD families.

Her husband was diagnosed with PTSD in May of 2005 after combat. Fortunately, he was able to receive treatment within the Army medical system immediately upon his request.

As a family, they have gone through various treatments including medications, individual counseling, and group therapy, and her husband now lives a regular "ordinary" life without any of these aids.

Heather feels blessed to be able to share their story and triumph and has dedicated herself to helping other families accomplish the same goals while fighting against domestic violence in PTSD relationships. Heather is the Contributions Coordinator for Family of a Vet and the National Authorized Provider Coordinator for DEMi.

What is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) occurs when someone is exposed once, or repeatedly, to stressful events in their lives. **Common examples of stressors that can cause PTSD are combat experience, rape, severe car accidents, or loss of a loved one.**

Symptoms for PTSD typically do not begin to surface for a minimum of six weeks following the event, and most patients are showing at least some symptoms within three months of the incident or end of the trauma. **However, it is possible for PTSD symptoms not to develop for several months or even years following the cause of trauma.**

The symptoms of PTSD vary but a person must have at least one symptom from each of the three categories of symptoms to be qualified by medical personnel as having PTSD.

Symptoms of PTSD:

Psychological Symptoms:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Avoidance/Lack of Emotion
- Intrusive Thoughts
- Hallucinations

Behavioral Symptoms:

- Extreme Rage (anger over things that would not have bothered you previously)
- “Short Fuse” (going from extremely relaxed to extremely angry in a matter of seconds)
- Isolating Yourself
- Alcohol or Drug Abuse
- Always Being on Guard (constantly scanning crowds, traffic, etc. for possible threats)

- Feeling Numb
- Memory Problems
- Lack of Concentration
- Nightmares
- Unable to Sleep or Stay Asleep
- Being Easily Startled (particularly to loud noises similar to explosions)
- Low Self Esteem
- Feeling Hopeless About the Future
- Not Wanting to See or Hear Anything That Reminds You of the Traumatic Event.
- Lack of Eating/Overeating

Physical Symptoms:

- Headaches
- Rapid Heart Rate or Sweating (when reminded of traumatic events)

Treatment Access:

Access to treatment is available through your healthcare provider, including the VA for combat-related PTSD. However, treatment can take time to process and gain access to, particularly within the VA.

The good news about PTSD is: The sooner you or your loved one seeks help, the more likely the person is to recover and lead a normal life.

Treatment can include group therapy, one-on-one therapy, and medications as well as holistic treatments found to be helpful by many studies.

The most important thing about PTSD treatment is to keep an open mind. PTSD is very individual to the patient and what works for someone else may not work for you.

Impact on Family:

PTSD also greatly affects the family members of PTSD patients. In fact, living with someone who has PTSD can actually cause someone to develop PTSD. This is called **secondary PTSD** and occurs in at least one third of PTSD spouses and caregivers.

Domestic violence rates skyrocket in PTSD relationships and, according to one study in 2005, as many as **81% of PTSD and depression-suffering combat veterans physically abused their spouse** in the past year of the study. In addition, **41% had committed an act of “severe” violence such as choking their loved one.**

Two Sources of Help for PTSD:

Here are the two organizations with which Heather Hummert works:

Family of a Vet (www.familyofavet.com) is an organization founded by Brannan and Caleb Vines dedicated to families who are transitioning out of the military and finding their way in the new “civilian” world.

With an emphasis on assisting families dealing with PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), FOV is the premiere organization assisting families of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. To get in touch with Family of a Vet, visit the website www.familyofavet.com

The project **D.E.M.i.** began when Heather sat at her father’s dining room table lamenting about assistance available for spouses of PTSD veterans. Heather cited the extreme problems with domestic violence in these relationships, and her father took notice of this.

Two years later, Heather and her father, in conjunction with a few wonderful friends, brought Domestic Emergency Monitoring Intelligence (D.E.M.i.TM) to the world.

Domestic Emergency Monitoring Intelligence (D.E.M.i.™) is a brand-new technology designed to help domestic violence victims in their moment of crisis.

D.E.M.i.™ is easily installed by the user, and complete instructions are on the DVD that accompanies the unit.

In case of a physically abusive situation, an abused loved one need only push a button to alert the D.E.M.i.™ Response Center, where Care Specialists will immediately dispatch emergency personnel including Law Enforcement, Emergency Medical Services, and even the Fire Department if necessary.

The D.E.M.i.™ Care Specialist will also contact neighbors or family members that may assist in non-emergency situations or be standing by to assist after the crisis.

For more information on D.E.M.i.™ email Heather at heather@familyofavet.com

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