

Effective Treatments for PTSD

Learn About:

- What you should know about PTSD and TBI
- Recommended treatment options for PTSD
- Recommended treatment options for insomnia and anxiety symptoms related to your PTSD
- New information about anti-anxiety medications and PTSD and why you may want to talk to your doctor about these medications



"Some of you may be questioning yourself – if I reach out for help and get treatment will it help me? I am a living testimony that it helped me. But there are some caveats here and this is, first of all you need to want the help. Secondly, you need to embrace the help. Thirdly, if medication is suggested be willing to utilize the tools given to you. Be willing to fully participate in your own recovery."

Robert Murphy
US Army (1966-1969)
1st Lieutenant / 1Lt, Infantry Unit Commander
Vietnam

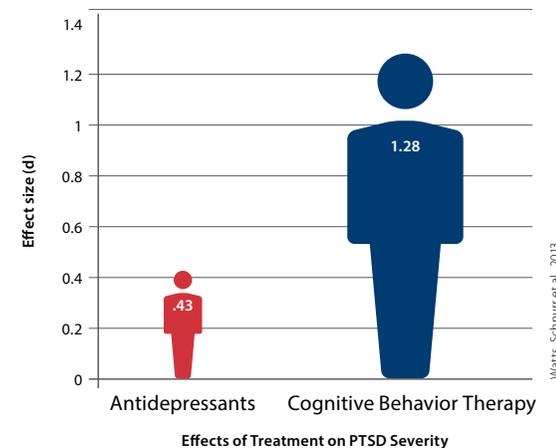
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www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/AboutFace

PTSD OVERVIEW

Posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, can occur after someone goes through or sees a traumatic event like combat, physical or sexual abuse, assault, serious accidents or natural disasters. If your reactions to these events do not go away after time and they disrupt your daily life, you may have PTSD. The good news is that there are effective treatments available for PTSD that can help you get better.

Treatments that Work

Both antidepressants and cognitive behavioral therapy have been shown effective for the treatment of PTSD.



Watts, Schnurr et al., 2013

This graph shows effect sizes for antidepressants and cognitive behavioral therapy. An effect size tells us how big or noticeable a change is. An effect size of 0.8 is considered large which means that other people would notice that there has been a change.

Recommended Psychotherapy Treatments

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is the most effective treatment for PTSD. CBT usually involves meeting with your therapist weekly up to four months. The two most effective types of CBT for PTSD are Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) and Prolonged Exposure (PE).

In CPT you examine what you're thinking and telling yourself about your trauma and decide whether those thoughts are accurate or inaccurate. It can be done individually or in a group.

PE works through repeated exposure to thoughts, feelings, and situations that you have been avoiding and helps you learn that reminders of the trauma do not have to be avoided. PE is done individually with your therapist.

Recommended Medications

Recommended medications for PTSD include antidepressants such as Zoloft and Paxil. These medications work by helping brain cells communicate which can make you feel better.

Anxiety

Psychotherapy Treatment Option(s): Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), CBT for Anxiety
Medication Option(s): Antidepressants like Zoloft and Paxil, or Effexor

Insomnia

Psychotherapy Treatment Option(s): Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) is highly effective. Other forms of CBT may be helpful.
Medication Option(s): low dose trazodone, prazosin, amitriptyline, doxepin, or benadryl

Do not STOP or change any medications you are currently taking without first discussing it with your doctor.

PTSD and TBI

If you have PTSD and a history of concussion or traumatic brain injury (TBI), it is important for you to know that:

- CBT treatments have been shown effective in patients with this co-occurring condition
- Antidepressants have also been shown to be effective but patients should work with their provider to reach the appropriate dose
- Anti-anxiety medications such as benzodiazepines may cause harmful side effects and should not be used

If you have PTSD and have had a head injury, it is particularly important that your doctor be aware of your history. This will then help determine the best treatment options for you.

Caution about Benzodiazepines

Some doctors have prescribed benzodiazepines for patients with PTSD. These medications may be known as Valium, Xanax, Klonopin or Ativan. Benzodiazepines may help in the short term and make you feel better quickly, but we now know that they do not improve the overall symptoms of PTSD and their helpful effects do not last.

These medications are often prescribed to help treat specific symptoms such as anxiety or insomnia. However, long-term use of these medications may lead to harmful side effects.

For more information visit www.ptsd.va.gov

Or contact your local evidence-based treatment coordinator:

Treatment Comparison Chart

	Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	Antidepressants	Prazosin	Trazodone
How it Works	Helps you learn about how your beliefs and memories about your trauma have impacted your life Focuses on symptoms such as anxiety or insomnia	Helps brain cells send and receive messages Reduces the core symptoms of PTSD	Blocks adrenalin in the brain Reduces nightmares	Helps brain cells send and receive messages Limited effects on overall symptoms of PTSD Improves sleep
Potential Benefits	Decreases PTSD symptoms, anxiety, depression, and can improve sleep	Improves PTSD symptoms, but has variable effects on sleep	Significant improvement in sleep	Improves sleep disruption for PTSD patients
Potential Drawbacks	Talking about trauma can be difficult initially	May cause headaches, nausea, decreased sex drive, and fatigue	May cause lightheadedness	May worsen mood
Duration	8-15 weekly sessions with long-lasting effects	Usually need to continue indefinitely	Need to continue	Usually need to continue indefinitely
Evidence of Success	Research shows this is one of the most effective treatments for PTSD	Significant overall improvement in PTSD-related symptoms	Significant improvement in sleep and other PTSD-related symptoms	Helpful for sleep, but not for overall symptoms of PTSD