



1ST DISTRICT SERVICE OFFICER VA & R REPORT FOR MARCH 2025

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VA NEWS & INFORMATION:

Depression is a multifaceted condition that can manifest in various forms, each affecting individuals in unique ways. For veterans, the challenges of navigating depression and its variants, such as dysthymia, can be particularly pronounced. Dysthymia, characterized by persistent low mood and a sense of hopelessness, often intertwines with the experiences veterans face, including the weight of past traumas and the transition to civilian life.

Dercum's Disease can significantly impact veterans, often manifesting as painful growths, fatigue, and emotional distress, which can complicate their adjustment to civilian life. Many veterans may find themselves grappling with not only the physical symptoms but also the psychological toll of living with a chronic condition. Understanding Dercum's Disease is crucial for veterans, as it empowers them to navigate their health challenges more effectively and seek the necessary support.

Agoraphobia presents unique challenges for veterans, significantly impacting their daily lives and mental well-being. This anxiety disorder often leads to an intense fear of being in situations where escape might be difficult or help unavailable, which can result in veterans avoiding public spaces or social interactions altogether. The effects of agoraphobia can exacerbate feelings of isolation and distress, making it difficult for veterans to engage with their communities or access necessary support services. Understanding the symptoms of agoraphobia such as panic attacks, excessive worry, and avoidance behaviors is crucial for veterans to recognize their experiences and seek appropriate help.

With WWII fast approaching, the U.S. military looked for affordable materials for mass-producing equipment, and asbestos fit the bill. It was abundant in the markets and had a fair price, so all five military branches utilized products containing the toxic material. It resulted in many service members' exposure, especially veterans of the Second World War, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

Asbestos exposure can lead to several serious health issues, primarily affecting the lungs and respiratory system. Veterans may be at long term risk for conditions such as asbestosis, a chronic lung disease that causes scarring of lung tissue, and mesothelioma, a rare but aggressive cancer that forms in the lining of the lungs,

abdomen, or heart. Additionally, asbestos exposure can contribute to lung cancer and pleural effusion, which is the buildup of fluid between the layers of tissue lining the lungs.

One of the most prevalent long-term conditions affecting veterans is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This mental health condition can significantly impact the lives of those who have bravely served, often leading to challenges in daily functioning, relationships, and overall well-being.

Understanding the symptoms of PTSD is a crucial step in the healing journey for veterans, as it allows them to recognize the impact of their experiences on their mental health. Common symptoms include flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and emotional numbness, all of which can be overwhelming and isolating. It's essential for veterans to not only identify these symptoms but also to seek help and support when needed.

Certain military professions are commonly associated with higher rates of long-term physical and mental health challenges. Here are a few military professions that may present long-term challenges to some veterans.

1. **Combat Arms (Infantry, Special Forces, Artillery, etc.)** – These roles involve direct combat, which exposes soldiers to high levels of stress, danger, and trauma. The physical toll can also be severe, with many veterans suffering from chronic injuries like joint damage, back problems, and hearing loss from exposure to gunfire and explosions. PTSD is also prevalent among those who experience intense combat situations.
2. **Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD)** – EOD technicians deal with bombs and unexploded ordnance, putting them in extremely dangerous situations. The constant stress of handling life-threatening devices can lead to mental health issues, including anxiety and PTSD. Physical injuries from bomb explosions are also a real risk.
3. **Combat Medics/Corpsmen** – While medics perform a critical and honorable role, they are often exposed to traumatic situations where they witness significant loss of life or injury, and sometimes they experience moral injury or survivor's guilt. The emotional and psychological toll of tending to the wounded or dying can lead to long-term mental health struggles.
4. **Pilots (especially in combat aviation)** – Flying combat missions, particularly during high-intensity conflicts, can be mentally and physically taxing. Pilots are exposed to the stress of performing dangerous tasks while under fire, and they may face higher rates of PTSD, anxiety, or depression. The pressure to make life-or-death decisions quickly can weigh heavily on them.

5. **Veterans of Prolonged Deployments** – Regardless of profession, veterans who have experienced long or multiple deployments—especially those in active combat zones—often experience challenges with reintegration into civilian life, mental health issues, and family or social difficulties. The constant exposure to combat or high-stress environments can have long-lasting effects.

These roles can have an outsized impact on mental and physical health, but it's important to recognize that each individual's experience is unique.

The resources available to veterans, their support systems, and their personal resilience can all play a significant role in how they cope with their military service after they return to civilian life.

Did you know the limb most commonly amputated among U.S. veterans is the lower limb of the leg, often due to injuries sustained in combat? Historically, this has been a significant issue for veterans, especially those who served in conflicts like World War I, World War II, Vietnam, and more recently, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Did you know that many veterans experience chronic pain as a result of injuries sustained during service? As a result, opioid pain relievers like hydrocodone, oxycodone, and morphine were historically among the most prescribed VA medications. However, due to the opioid crisis, there has been a push to reduce opioid prescriptions, and many veterans are now prescribed non-opioid pain relievers like acetaminophen, NSAIDs (like ibuprofen), or muscle relaxants.

Meniere's Syndrome is a complex and often misunderstood inner ear disorder that poses unique challenges for veterans. Characterized by episodes of vertigo (an intense spinning sensation) alongside persistent tinnitus (ringing in the ears), fluctuating hearing loss, and a feeling of fullness or pressure in the ear, this condition can severely disrupt daily activities and quality of life for veterans.

Veterans with Meniere's Syndrome may find themselves grappling with the unpredictability of their symptoms, which can lead to difficulties in employment, social interactions, and even personal relationships. The fear of sudden vertigo attacks can instill a sense of anxiety and limit participation in activities they once enjoyed, contributing to feelings of isolation. Understanding and addressing these challenges is crucial for veterans and their families.

Did you know you can use the camera on your phone, computer, or tablet, and connect to the VA Video Connect App? Using VA Video Connect App will give you direct, real-time access to your health care team. If you're

a veteran who receives VA health care, has an internet connection, and an email account, you may be able to use this app for your next appointment.

How does VA Video Connect work?

When your VA care team schedules an appointment using VA Video Connect, you will receive an email with a link to join a virtual medical room. The email will include resources to help you get ready to use VA Video Connect. At the time of your appointment, click on the link, enter your name, and begin the session with your doctor or other providers. You can include family members or other caregivers, who can join the VA Video Connect session from anywhere.

Did you know as with most disabilities, the VA rating for sleep apnea depends on your particular situation? The military provides an extremely physically demanding environment that can lead to many conditions associated with sleep apnea, ranging from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to various injuries that limit mobility, plus exposure to a wide variety of dust and fumes. Some indications are that one in five U.S. veterans has sleep apnea, and in one study, veterans of combat in Iraq were more than 45% more likely than non-combatants to develop sleep apnea



Remember..... That all gave some, but many gave all!