

Veterans and Sleep

Both government and medical authorities have documented that our Veterans are more prone to significant sleep problems and poor sleep quality. More specifically, our Veterans are far more likely to suffer from Insomnia, PTSD and Sleep Apnea than those who are not in the military.

Sleep Apnea is a sleep disorder that directly affects a person's breathing. In severe cases, sufferers can momentarily stop breathing up to a hundred times per night. This results in the body and brain not receiving sufficient oxygen.

Insomnia relates to the sufferer having an inability to fall asleep and stay asleep. This habitual sleeplessness will result in chronic fatigue, low energy and difficulty maintaining focus.

PTSD is a mental health problem that results after a particularly distressing and stressful event such as assault, a natural disaster or life-threatening accident. In the case of our Veterans, the disturbing nature of war and combat most certainly qualifies as a traumatic event.

Most commonly, sleep problems arise from emotional trauma, stress, depression, brain injury and PTSD. It is for this reason that most sleep experts believe that sleep disorders and mental health issues are interconnected.

For Example: A Veteran returning from a harrowing tour in which he was directly involved in front line combat and gunfire.

Upon return from duty, the soldier has trouble falling asleep due to horrific memories and flashbacks. In the event the soldier does fall asleep, he wakes often due to nightmares.

In this example it's obvious that this soldier has suffered emotional trauma from his tour of duty. A medical professional or sleep expert may be required to assess if the Veteran's inability to sleep has caused symptoms of depression and anxiety, or is it in fact PTSD that has negatively impacted the soldier's sleep and caused his Insomnia? It is this interconnection that makes sleep disorders in Veterans sometimes difficult to diagnose and decide on the best treatment for each individual.

Insufficient sleep can result in mood swings, depression and increased risk of physical health problems. It is of the utmost importance that Veterans seek help if sleep issues arise. Sleep deprivation at its very core can affect one's reflexes and balance, which is of more concern as our Veterans age and mobility decreases. .

Veterans can make changes in their lifestyle to help alleviate some sleep issues.

Meditation, regular exercise and a repetitive sleep routine can improve sleep quality.

Lifestyle choices such as avoiding alcohol and cigarette smoking can also contribute to a better night's sleep. Where lifestyle changes are not sufficient, Veterans may need to seek advice from a therapist or doctor who may be able to prescribe sleeping aids, medication or treatment.

Sleep is the brain's way of recharging our batteries for what lies ahead. Without sufficient sleep making simple decisions, staying focused and going about everyday duties can seem

like an insurmountable task. By improving the quality of our Veterans sleep, we can enable their bodies and minds to become more efficient in recuperating. This will in turn positively impact the overall quality of life for our Veterans as they adjust back into their civilian lives.