

HOW PTSD AFFECTS SLEEP HABITS

01 INSOMNIA
An estimated nine in ten people with PTSD suffer from insomnia. This is largely due to hyperarousal, in which the individual is unable to relax. It may also be a lingering effect of having been in a situation that required constant alertness at night. Insomnia in PTSD may also be self-perpetuating, as the stress of not being able to fall asleep eventually leads to maladaptive sleep behaviors such as daytime napping or substance abuse.

02 NIGHTMARES AND NIGHT TERRORS
Nightmares and night terrors plague a majority of people with PTSD, leading to nighttime awakenings and making it difficult to get back to sleep. The content of these vivid dreams is sometimes related to past trauma, with many PTSD sufferers reporting repetitive nightmares. Nightmares are sometimes treated with imagery rehearsal therapy, in which the patient "rehearses" the script of the dream with a less threatening version during waking hours.

03 OBSTRUCTIVE SLEEP APNEA (OSA)
It's not entirely clear why there is a higher prevalence of OSA among people with PTSD, but it may be due to underlying factors such as chronic alcohol or alcohol use. Doctors have found that continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) devices work well for treating OSA in people with PTSD and may even reduce nightmares, while not as effective, people who find CPAP devices triggering or claustrophobic may prefer to use a mandibular advancement device.

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SLEEP TIPS FOR PARTNERS OF PEOPLE WITH PTSD

01 NIGHTMARES AND NIGHT TERRORS
Nightmares and night terrors can be frightening and may cause your partner to lash out violently. Though you want to be there for your partner, you may find it necessary to sleep in a separate, nearby bedroom from time to time so you can get the restful sleep you need.

02 EXERCISE
It may also be constructive to do exercise together with your partner during the day. In addition to improving sleep, developing healthy routines together can help you bond and help re-establish a sense of security for your partner.

03 MENTAL HEALTH
Many caregivers struggle with feelings of guilt and a sense that they are responsible for "saving" their partner. However, pouring all your energy into helping another person can have a serious effect on your own mental health. Couples therapy, individual therapy, support groups, or a strong network of family and friends may help you manage your own thoughts and feelings to reduce the risk of burnout.

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Having sleep problems in PTSD can interfere with the brain's ability to process memories and emotions which may slow down the recovery process after a traumatic event. This could also lead to those with PTSD to use alcohol or other substances to help aid them in sleeping better which can worsen sleep and PTSD symptoms.¹

The most common sleep problems in PTSD can be split into 3 categories:¹

- Insomnia
- Nightmares and Night Terrors
- Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA)

How to Sleep Better with PTSD¹

- Keep a cool, dark, and quiet sleep environment.
- Use the bedroom for sleep and intimacy only.
- Stay on a regular sleep schedule.
- Eat a healthy diet and avoid caffeine before bedtime.
- Get regular exercise.
- Avoid stressors before bedtime, including talking about traumatic events.
- Take a warm bath or read a calming book before bed.
- Turn off screens an hour before bedtime.
- Use a white noise machine if you are sensitive to sounds.
- Use medication techniques or other techniques to prevent a busy mind.

¹ Pacheco, D. (2023). PTSD and Sleep. Sleep Foundation. How Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Affects Sleep | <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/mental-health/ptsd-and-sleep>

PTSD & Sleep Word Search

MDXSVSBYRPPARTNERSDJ
 IBFCMWTQTQNYUBRAEFANZ
 ZSBHLRRCRIUJMQMCXLTEIE
 SCKEQQQCWENESTURQCQFGM
 XQIDZGODZSSSPDAUKJMHE
 SPEUQJJJDONSOMIIMVETN
 BYILGJSGNVYOMDEYUDDTT
 JBMETAPPHORFRNTIWIIEA
 RENPTPEUWHBVYSITHCRL
 KDEYTGGRGTKNCGTGAIAARH
 BRXFSSOHEALTHYDIETT
 ROEYXHMMAQLWURLEIRAR
 EORPNVCSAODFRHAVNOSL
 CMCSLEEPAPNEAXTTONFT
 OXIYBZFBGGAGRLUEIKRHF
 VHSRLRUKNIGHMTMARESRJF
 ESEZAOYXPKHZXKEYKEKTH
 RNQCIFTZSYJISUPPORTOF
 YVTONUVOUXDJQKGPQLZF
 IWAZPREVENTIONKQUWTC

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|---------------|---------------|--------------|-----|
| Night Terrors | Mental Health | Healthy Diet | Aid |
| Sleep Apnea | White Noise | Nightmares | |
| Prevention | Stressors | Partners | |
| Symptoms | Schedule | Insomnia | |
| Exercise | Support | Quiet | |
| Recovery | Medication | Bedroom | |
| Brain | | | |

Got questions on other health issues related to sleep health, physical activity, tobacco, or nutrition? Share them with us and we will help you “Bust The Myths!” Send your questions to usaf.jbsa.afmsa.mbx.hpo@mail.mil. Make sure to include in the subject line “Health Myth Buster.” For more online health tips visit the Air Force Health Promotion webpage <https://www.airforcemedicine.af.mil/Resources/Health-Promotion/>



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Air Force Health Promotion HQ

Community Events

HERE'S WHAT'S GOING ON WHERE YOU LIVE

Your Local Health Promotion Office



Contact: Luke Christy
Phone: 609-1027
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Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday