



U.S. ARMY

OPERATION  
**READY**  
Reserve as for Educating About Deployment and You

GETTING PREPARED, STAYING PREPARED

## COMBAT STRESS REACTIONS

**EXPOSURE TO COMBAT** and war zone stressors can produce a number of normal stress reactions. Soldiers may experience reactions in theatre, but often reactions appear after returning home. Reactions tend to change and disappear over time. It is important for each Soldier to know the signs of combat stress/posttraumatic stress.

### Physical Reactions

Rapid heart rate, shortness of breath | Headaches, dizziness | Tingling or numb toes and fingers | Nausea, upset stomach or diarrhea | Twitching, cold sweats, chills | Dry mouth, thirst, grinding teeth | Fatigue | Jitters, trembling or jumpiness; easily startled

### Behavioral Reactions

Carelessness, recklessness | Outbursts of anger or aggressiveness | Staring into space; "1000 yd stare" | Inability to do job | Complete unresponsiveness to others; Detachment | Avoiding things that are reminders of war zone

### Mental/Emotional Reactions

Amnesia, memory loss | Confusion, trouble concentrating and/or making decisions | Hallucinations or delusions | Suicidal thoughts | Grief | Sadness and/or depression | Feeling emotionally numb | Survivor guilt; Self-blame | Anxiety, hypervigilance, "keyed-up," irritable, angry | Difficulty sleeping, nightmares, flashbacks | Low self-esteem; loss of faith in self, mission, or unit | Feelings of isolation

### When To Seek Help

These reactions can be lasting and have negative effects if not identified and treated early. All Soldiers will be screened in theatre and after returning home.

Soldiers should seek professional help if reactions are severe or interfere with job performance, relationships with others, and life or persist months after returning home. Seek help immediately if these reactions lead to hurting others (e.g., brutality, abuse of family members).



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## TIPS FOR COPING WITH COMBAT STRESS AND WHERE TO GET HELP

No Soldier is immune from developing combat stress or posttraumatic stress. For this reason, the Army provides informational briefings and trainings as well as offers support in theatre and post deployment. Soldiers can also take steps on their own to manage emotions, cope with stress reactions, and get needed help. The key is to act early.

### In Combat

Eat sensibly; drink lots of fluids. | Communicate with your team. | Sleep 5-8 hours in each 24 hour period. | Stay positive and adaptable. | Stay active and physically fit. | Share your grief with chaplains, friends and leaders. | Practice personal hygiene. | Practice relaxation techniques in down time. | Breathe deeply; stay calm and collected. | Understand and practice self aid. | Be supportive of others.

★ Help is available from any of the following:

- Command
- Unit Chaplain
- Combat stress team

### At Home

Eat healthfully and exercise regularly. | Talk to someone you trust. | Find effective ways to relax. | Monitor your emotions and reactions. | Think before you act. | Control your anger, withdrawal and driving. | Do not abuse alcohol or drugs. | Talk with and renew relationships with your family. | Acknowledge your family's decisions and changes and renegotiate your role. | Give yourself time to reintegrate and recover. | Participate in social activities and do fun things. Stay connected.

★ Help is available from any of the following:

- Chaplain
- Medical clinic or mental/behavioral health services
- Civilian mental health professional
- Veterans Affairs Readjustment Counseling
- Military OneSource  
[www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com)
- DoD's Mental Health Self-Assessment  
[www.MilitaryMentalHealth.org](http://www.MilitaryMentalHealth.org)

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