Department of Veterans Affairs

OEF/OIF POST-DEPLOYMENT

FACT SHEET

Managing Stress

Many brave men and women risk their lives in combat. During this time, service members are exposed to stressful events. The amount of lasting problems depends on many factors.

What you need to know

When returning from war, it is normal to still feel stressed. Stress is the body's way to protect you. When working properly, stress helps you stay alert. Too much stress can wear down your physical and mental health. Common signs of excess stress are:

- Muscle tension
- Mood swings and rapid or shallow breathing
- Trouble concentrating or remembering things
- Difficulty sleeping and fatigue
- Upset stomach, diarrhea or constipation

Seek help if you are experiencing severe stress symptoms. This could be a sign of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). There are treatments available. For more information refer to the PTSD fact sheet.

What things influence your stress tolerance?

Each person deals with stress differently. Past experiences, relationships, and your mindset affect how you deal with stress.

- **Knowledge and preparation.** It is important to educate yourself with information about stress. Knowledge is the first step to managing your stress in a healthy way.
- **Support group.** A strong group of friends and family can help buffer stress. Isolation puts you at more risk to have excess stress.
- **Attitude and outlook on life.** Being positive can help you when dealing with stress. Accept the changes in your life since deployment and embrace the challenge.

What are some common triggers for stress?

Identifying your triggers can help you avoid excess stress. Everyone is sensitive to different things. Below are common triggers for stress. You can use the empty spaces to write in your triggers.

Outside Influence
• **Major life changes**
• **Relationship difficulties**
• **Financial Problems**
• **Employment**
• **Children and family**
• _____
• _____
• _____

Personal Influence
• **Negative mind-set**
• **Impossible expectations**
• **Poor self esteem**
• **Avoiding challenges**
• **Isolation**
• _____
• _____
• _____

What are some ways to cope with stress?

It is important to take care of your mental and emotional needs. The following suggestions may help you.

- **Try to identify what is causing your stress.** Write down what triggers your stress. Make a list of ways to solve each stressor and try the best one.
- **Seek out social support.** Sharing your feelings can help reduce stress. Spend time with friends and family.
- **Share your worries.** Try and talk with other Veterans. They probably have a **lot** of the same feelings you do.

Tips for managing your stress

Below are some other tips that may help to relieve stress.

- **Address your spiritual needs.** Some people find strength in prayer. Some seek help from a religious or spiritual advisor.
- **Have a sense of humor.** Laughter makes you feel good and relieves stress. Humor can help you look at stressful situations in a different way. .
- **Try deep breathing and meditation.** This can relax both your body and mind. You may have trouble concentrating at first. Don't worry. Meditation often becomes easier with practice.

When shoud you get help?

Feeling stressed after deployment is normal. Symptoms may last for 1 to 2 months. Seek help if these symptoms last longer or interfere with activities in your daily life. This may mean a normal stress reaction is becoming a problem.

REMEMBER...

Stress is a normal response. It is the body's way to protect you. Each person deals with stress differently. Identifying what triggers your stress is helpful. Too much stress can wear down your physical and mental health. Seek help if symptoms last longer than 2 months or interfere with daily life.

Welcome Home

St. John ✶ St. Thomas ✶ St. Croix