

# PRIMARY CARE PROVIDERS: PTSD TREATMENT STARTS WITH *YOU*

Key Recommendations from the [VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline \(CPG\) for PTSD](#)

Primary Care Providers have an important role in treating Veterans with PTSD. Know the facts and use this as a quick guide to recommend **the most effective treatment options** when caring for Veterans with PTSD.



## DID YOU KNOW?

- About **1 out of every 10** Veterans receiving care in VA have PTSD.
- Among OEF/OIF/OND Veterans who use VA, **1 in 4 men and 1 in 5** women have PTSD.
- **1 in 5** Veterans with PTSD will only see their Primary Care Provider for PTSD treatment.
- Treating Veterans with PTSD in Primary Care **improves engagement** in care.



## YOUR ROLE IN EFFECTIVE PTSD CARE

Primary Care Providers are often the first clinicians Veterans visit when they have symptoms of PTSD. It is important for you to be able to connect them to effective PTSD treatment. Follow these tips and recommendations to ensure all Veterans are receiving the best care possible.



## KEY CPG RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Engage patients in shared decision making, which includes educating patients about effective treatment options. The **PTSD Treatment Decision Aid** can be an effective tool in this process.
- ✓ Evaluate patients using screening instruments for PTSD such as the **Primary Care PTSD Screen (PC-PTSD)** or the **PTSD Checklist (PCL-5)**.
- ✓ Recommend individual trauma-focused psychotherapies, not medications, as the primary treatment for PTSD.
- ✓ If trauma-focused psychotherapy is not available or preferred, discuss specific antidepressant or individual non-trauma-focused psychotherapy options.

## USE THE PRIMARY CARE PTSD SCREEN (PC-PTSD)

Current research suggests that the results of the **PC-PTSD** should be considered "positive" if a patient answers "yes" to any three items. A positive response to the screen does not necessarily indicate that a patient has PTSD. However, a positive response does mean that a patient may have PTSD or trauma-related problems, and further investigation of trauma symptoms by a mental health professional may be warranted. Patients who screen positive for PTSD should be explicitly screened for suicidal ideation as well.

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## UNDERSTANDING EFFECTIVE TREATMENT OPTIONS

Trauma-focused psychotherapies are the best treatment option for PTSD. Consider recommending:

- ★ Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), which teaches patients to reframe negative thoughts about trauma.
- ★ Prolonged Exposure (PE), which teaches patients how to gain control by facing their fears.
- ★ Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), which helps patients process and make sense of their trauma while paying attention to a back-and-forth movement or sound (such as a light or tone).

If medication is preferred, the recommended anti-depressants are Sertraline, Paroxetine, Fluoxetine, and Venlafaxine. Prazosin is no longer recommended for the treatment of PTSD-related nightmares. There is evidence against atypical antipsychotics, benzodiazepines, and cannabis.

## PLAN AHEAD FOR RESISTANCE

- ✓ Be approachable. Talk openly about military experience and mental health issues.
- ✓ Tell your patient that trauma-focused psychotherapy is the best option for recovery.
- ✓ If a patient declines a referral, explore why that is.
- ✓ Emphasize that PTSD symptoms will likely not improve without treatment.
- ✓ Think twice before prescribing medications.
- ✓ For the best outcomes, keep the focus on treating PTSD. Focusing on symptoms like insomnia or anxiety is not as effective and may lead to some contraindicated prescribing practices.

## MEASUREMENT DURING CARE

Use the PTSD Checklist (PCL-5) to track symptom change and identify clinical gains or setbacks to your patient. Additionally, it can be used as an intervention tool when speaking to your patient about their current level of distress and how treatment can address these difficulties.

Explore more information on [screening options](#).

## LEARN MORE

- Contact the **PTSD Consultation Program** for free, personalized consultation on treating Veterans with PTSD.
- Encourage your patients to explore and compare treatment options with the **PTSD Treatment Decision Aid**.
- Visit the **National Center for PTSD** for more information on treating patients with PTSD.