For Veterans and Families:

UNDERSTANDING PTSD AND SUBSTANCE USE

for Veterans, General Public, Family and Friends

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can occur after someone goes through combat, physical or sexual assault, terrorist attack, serious accident or natural disaster. PTSD symptoms include feeling keyed up, having flashbacks of an event, avoiding reminders of the event, or feeling numb to things you used to enjoy.

What is substance use disorder (SUD)? Some people try to cope with their PTSD by drinking heavily, using drugs, or smoking too much. Eventually, the overuse of these substances can develop into substance use disorder (SUD), and treatment should be given for both PTSD and SUD to lead to successful recovery. The good news is that treatment of co-occurring (happening at the same time) PTSD and SUD works.

How common is co-occurring PTSD and SUD? Almost 1 out of every 3 Veterans seeking treatment for SUD also have PTSD. More than 1 of every 4 Veterans with PTSD also have SUD. VA offers treatments that help. You are not alone.

What treatments are available for co-occurring PTSD and SUD? Evidence shows that treating PTSD and SUD at the same time works to treat both conditions. Some people choose to do different therapies for PTSD and SUD at the same time.

- For PTSD, trauma-focused psychotherapies are the most effective treatments. Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Prolonged Exposure (PE), and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) use different techniques to help people process their traumatic experiences.
- The most effective treatments for SUD include relapse prevention, cognitive behavioral therapy, and contingency management. There are also medication options.
- COPE is a therapy that integrates trauma-focused PTSD treatment with SUD treatment.
- Treatment for specific symptoms like pain, anger or sleep problems are options as well.

27% of Veterans in VA care diagnosed with PTSD also have substance use disorder(SUD)

What else should I know about treatment? There are many levels and types of treatment options available. The first step is to talk to a VA health professional and ask for more information. There are successful treatments for co-occurring PTSD and SUD. Recovery is achievable. You can have a life without your symptoms. Your VA provider can help you get started.

When should a person get evaluated for co-occurring PTSD and SUD? If you continue to be troubled or distracted by your experiences for more than three months or have questions about your drinking or drug use, learn more about the options. Life can be better! Talk to a VA professional to discuss choices for getting started.

"It was a big deal for me to enter treatment. I was so close to hitting bottom. I wasn't sure I'd last. But I'd learned to tough it out, and that was helpful."

STEVE, AFGHANISTAN VETERAN

"I entered treatment in 2009, after maybe 2 really bad years of PTSD and alcoholism. The VA staff was amazing. It's a whole new day for me."

JOE, IRAQ VETERAN

VA Medical Centers and Treatment

VA wants you to have the best possible care for co-occurring PTSD and SUD. Each VA medical center has PTSD-SUD Specialists trained in treating both conditions to promote the best health outcomes. If there are signs you are at risk for both PTSD and SUD, your provider will help you decide on the best treatment option for you. There are treatment resources at every VA medical center.

WWW.PTSD.VA.GOV

National Center for PTSD
POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER