

Nightmares

It is not unusual to have nightmares during times of stress. For combat veterans, these nightmares may include combat scenes. If you have frequent and distressing nightmares, please talk to your medical or mental health provider. Frequent nightmares may be a sign of a more serious problem.

Tips for Coping with Nightmares

- ★ The morning after a nightmare, spend some time thinking about what might be causing increased stress in your life. Even positive stress (such as getting married, a new job, moving) can cause anxiety that may result in nightmares.
- ★ Practice some form of relaxation every night before bed. Try imagining yourself in a calming or relaxing place, practice deep slow breathing, or listen to soothing music or sounds.
- ★ Make your bedroom as soothing and comfortable as possible. Think about leaving a dim light or nightlight on to help you recognize your surroundings more quickly if you wake up from a nightmare.

Causes of Sleep Problems

- ★ **Medical problems** such as pain, depression, side effects of medicines, or trouble breathing
- ★ **Circadian rhythm disorder**, a shift in the body's normal 24-hour activity cycle
- ★ **Lifestyle factors** such as a changing sleep schedule, lack of exercise, or too much caffeine
- ★ **Sleep settings** such as a poor mattress, noise, or a room that's too hot or too cold
- ★ **Stress** such as problems at work, money worries, or family events

Assessment & Treatment

The first step in treating sleeping problems is to understand what may be causing the sleep problem. Talk with your doctors. They may suggest a sleep study, an intensive exam of whether medical problems (such as sleep apnea) are part of your sleep problem.

Treatment for sleep disorders can include medicines and working with a sleep specialist to learn ways to improve sleep. Some of these tips are listed on the inside of this brochure.



Quick Guide - Patient/Family Readjustment

Military personnel are deeply affected by their war experiences. Adjustment difficulties are common. These are normal reactions to abnormal experiences. This series of brochures deal with issues that are common following deployment. Remember - identifying your problem areas and seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. It means you are actively coping with your challenges.

Sleep Problems & Nightmares

- ★ Ongoing sleep problems can harm relationships and the ability to work and concentrate
- ★ Nightmares interfere with sleep and can be a sign of other problems
- ★ There are treatments that can help with sleep problems and nightmares



Tips for Improving your Sleep

Your lifestyle affects your health and your sleep. Here are some healthy sleep habits.

★ **Keep a regular sleep schedule -**

Go to bed and get up at the same time each day, even on weekends.

★ **Have a bedtime routine -**

Follow the same routine every night to help your body and mind know when it's time to sleep.

★ **Exercise regularly -**

Exercise will help you feel more tired at night and will help reduce stress.

★ **Relax in the evening -**

Avoid things that get you "revved up" for two to four hours before bedtime. Things that tend to do this include heavy meals, strenuous exercise, heated arguments, paying bills, and action-packed movies.

★ **Avoid or limit naps -**

Regular naps can set your sleep schedule to include more daytime than nighttime sleep.

★ **Use your bed only for sleep and sex -**

Keep the television and/or computer out of the bedroom. This will help your mind learn to associate sleeping with the bedroom, and sleeping with your bed. Likewise, try to only sleep in your bed, rather than falling asleep on the sofa.

★ **Do not spend hours in bed trying to fall asleep -**

If you can't fall asleep within 30 minutes, get up and do something else until you become tired and drowsy. Then try going to bed again.

★ **Avoid or limit caffeine and nicotine -**

Both can keep you awake at night, and caffeine can stay in the system for as long as 12 hours.

★ **Avoid alcohol -**

While many people find it helps them fall asleep, the sleep will not be as restful as sleep without alcohol. Regular use of alcohol may also lead to more serious problems. Talk to your doctor about short-term sleep medicines that you might be able to try that will not have harmful side effects.

If your worries will not let you sleep, write them down in a diary. Then close it, and go to bed.