

## Psychological Impact: Chronic Pain

  
**BeyondDuty+**

**Chronic pain** is a common and debilitating issue for many UK veterans. It may result from injuries sustained during service, overuse of joints, or surgical complications, and is frequently seen in conditions such as:

- **Back and neck pain**
- **Joint and nerve damage**
- **Post-surgical pain**
- **Phantom pain** after amputation

Unlike acute pain, chronic pain is persistent, often lasting months or years, and can dominate a person's life. It is strongly linked to:

- **Depression** and low mood
- **Sleep disorders** and fatigue
- **Anxiety** and irritability
- **Social withdrawal** and isolation

The psychological toll of chronic pain can lead veterans to feel **hopeless**, **misunderstood**, or **invalidated** – especially if the pain is “invisible” to others. Many may turn to substance misuse or develop dependence on painkillers, further complicating their mental health.

Effective treatment involves a multidisciplinary approach, including:

- **Pain management** clinics
- **Physiotherapy** and **occupational therapy**
- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy** (CBT) for pain
- **Peer support** and pain coping groups

Services like **NHS Pain Clinics**, **Op COURAGE**, and support charities such as **Help for Heroes** are essential in supporting veterans to manage chronic pain both physically and emotionally.

# Psychological Support in Managing Chronic Pain for UK Veterans

Chronic pain is a common and complex issue among UK veterans, often intertwined with **mental health challenges** such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). **Psychological support** is essential in helping veterans manage the emotional and cognitive aspects of chronic pain, improving their overall well-being.

In the UK, cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) is widely used within the National Health Service (NHS) to help veterans reframe negative pain-related thoughts and develop effective coping strategies. CBT supports veterans in reducing the emotional impact of pain, enhancing pain tolerance, and regaining control over daily life.

**Mindfulness-based interventions** and **acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT)** are also increasingly incorporated into pain management programs. These therapies encourage veterans to engage with their pain in a non-judgmental way, fostering resilience and helping them focus on meaningful activities despite ongoing discomfort.

Several veteran-specific services and charities provide tailored psychological support for chronic pain:


- **Combat Stress**, the UK's leading mental health charity for veterans, offers psychological therapies, including trauma-focused CBT, that address both mental health conditions and chronic pain-related distress.
- **Help for Heroes** funds specialist programs that combine physical rehabilitation with psychological support to treat complex pain and mental health issues in veterans.
- **The NHS Veterans' Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS)** provides support for veterans adjusting to civilian life, including access to psychological therapies for pain management and related mental health concerns.
- **Veterans' peer support groups**, such as those facilitated by **The Royal British Legion**, offer community-based emotional support, helping veterans share their experiences and develop coping mechanisms within a supportive network.

By integrating psychological care with medical treatment, UK veterans can benefit from a holistic approach that addresses both the physical and mental aspects of chronic pain. This approach is crucial for improving quality of life and supporting veterans in their journey toward recovery and meaningful civilian lives.

## Contact Us

For more information and support, get in touch with our advisors and veterans with lived experience today.

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