



BeyondDuty+

Psychological Impact of Chronic or Long-Term Illness and Injury in UK Veterans

Many UK veterans live with **chronic or long-term illnesses** that, while sometimes invisible, carry significant emotional and physical burdens. Common conditions include:

- **Cardiovascular disease**
- **Chronic respiratory disorders**
- **Autoimmune conditions**
- **Arthritis** and joint deterioration
- **Service-related illnesses** (e.g., due to chemical or environmental exposure)

These health issues often stem from the physical demands and risks of military service. Veterans face a dual challenge: managing ongoing medical needs while navigating civilian healthcare systems that may lack understanding of military backgrounds.

Psychological Effects

Chronic illness or injury can significantly impact veterans' mental well-being, especially when compounded by physical pain or loss of function. Common **psychological effects** include:

- **Chronic fatigue** and emotional exhaustion
- **Anxiety** about the future
- **Feelings of being a burden**
- **Loss of independence** and purpose

Veterans discharged due to ill health may experience a particularly **sharp decline in mental health**, facing a crisis of identity and reduced self-worth. Many derive their sense of self from physical capability and military roles; long-term illness can undermine this, leading to grief, frustration, and depression.

Mental health conditions such as **anxiety, depression, and PTSD** are frequently exacerbated by chronic illness. These effects often result in social withdrawal and difficulty adjusting to civilian life. Stigma around mental health in military culture may further deter veterans from seeking help, worsening both emotional distress and physical symptoms in a harmful feedback loop.

Support Strategies and Services

Addressing the psychological impact of long-term illness and injury requires integrated, veteran-centred care that combines physical and mental health support. Key UK services and support options include:

- **NHS Veterans Mental Health Services**
Offers specialist psychological therapies including CBT, trauma-focused therapy, and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) to help veterans manage pain, trauma, and adjustment.
- **Combat Stress**
A leading veterans' mental health charity providing expert psychological support, including residential care for complex trauma, counselling, and peer support to combat isolation.
- **Veterans UK**
A Ministry of Defence service that helps veterans access healthcare, benefits, and rehabilitation programmes.
- **Help for Heroes and the Royal British Legion**
These organisations deliver both mental health support and physical rehabilitation, promoting recovery and resilience.
- **Peer Support Networks**
Veteran-led groups offer a sense of belonging and understanding, helping reduce isolation and improve emotional well-being.

The Importance of Holistic Care

Successful recovery depends on holistic care that integrates physical rehabilitation with psychological therapy. CBT helps veterans reframe negative thought patterns and build coping strategies, while ACT supports adjustment to long-term changes. This dual approach improves engagement with physical treatment and enhances overall quality of life.

Contact Us

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



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