



BeyondDuty+

Sleep Disorders

Sleep problems – including insomnia, nightmares, and sleep apnoea – are particularly common among veterans, **often linked to PTSD or chronic pain**. Sleep disorders impair **emotional regulation, memory, and physical health**, creating a vicious cycle that exacerbates other mental health conditions.

Psychological Impact of Sleep Disorders and Support for UK Veterans

Sleep disorders are a common and significant issue affecting many UK veterans, often **intertwined with psychological health** challenges stemming from military service. Problems such as **insomnia, nightmares, sleep apnoea, and restless leg syndrome** can severely disrupt sleep quality, leading to profound effects on mental well-being and daily functioning.

For veterans, sleep disturbances frequently co-occur with conditions like **PTSD, anxiety, and depression**, creating a vicious cycle where poor sleep worsens **psychological symptoms**, and those symptoms further impair sleep.

Key psychological impacts include:

- **Increased Anxiety and Stress:** Difficulty sleeping heightens anxiety levels, making it harder for veterans to relax or manage stress.
- **Exacerbation of PTSD Symptoms:** Nightmares and night terrors related to traumatic experiences can interrupt sleep, perpetuating trauma-related distress.
- **Mood Disorders:** Chronic sleep deprivation can lead to or worsen depression and irritability.
- **Cognitive Impairment:** Lack of restorative sleep impacts concentration, memory, and decision-making abilities, affecting employment and social interactions.
- **Reduced Resilience:** Poor sleep lowers overall emotional resilience, making it

more difficult for veterans to cope with everyday challenges.

- **Risk of Substance Misuse:** Some veterans may turn to alcohol or drugs to self-medicate sleep problems, increasing the risk of dependency.

Psychological Support and Treatment in the UK

Recognising the profound connection between sleep and mental health, UK veterans have access to several support options:

- **NHS Veterans Mental Health Services:** These offer comprehensive assessment and treatment for sleep disorders linked to psychological issues. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I) is a frontline treatment that helps veterans develop healthier sleep habits and reduce anxiety around sleep.
- **Specialist PTSD Services:** For veterans with trauma-related sleep disturbances, trauma-focused therapies such as EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) and trauma-focused CBT can reduce nightmares and improve overall sleep quality.
- **Pharmacological Support:** In some cases, short-term use of sleep aids may be prescribed, though psychological therapies remain preferred to address underlying causes.
- **Veteran Charities and Peer Support:** Organisations like Combat Stress and Help for Heroes provide access to counselling and support groups where veterans can share experiences and strategies for managing sleep problems.
- **Sleep Hygiene Education:** Many services offer guidance on improving sleep environments and routines, including relaxation techniques and mindfulness practices tailored to veterans' needs.
- **Integrated Care:** Increasingly, veteran healthcare incorporates holistic approaches addressing both mental and physical health factors influencing sleep, recognising the complex needs of this group.

Contact Us

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



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