

## Do Sleep Apnea and PTSD Have Overlapping Factors?

April 24, 2017/in PTSD, Veterans /by Allison Reddick, Attorney

Around 8% of the US population will experience PTSD in their life. While it is more common for veterans to suffer from PTSD than the average person due to the variety of stressful situations they experience, the VA estimates that the number of veterans that suffer from PTSD varies by service era:

- **Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Enduring Freedom (OEF):** About 11-20 out of every 100 Veterans (or between 11-20%) who served in OIF or OEF have PTSD in a given year.
- **Gulf War (Desert Storm):** About 12 out of every 100 Gulf War Veterans (or 12%) have PTSD in a given year.
- **Vietnam War:** About 15 out of every 100 Vietnam Veterans (or 15%) were currently diagnosed with PTSD at the time of the most recent study in the late 1980s, the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study (NVVRS). It is estimated that about 30 out of every 100 (or 30%) of Vietnam Veterans have had PTSD in their lifetime.

As the statistics show, PTSD is a condition seen among many veterans. To learn more about PTSD, click [here](#). With PTSD comes a variety of symptoms that affect sleep including difficulty falling asleep, nightmares, flashbacks, and insomnia. Scientific research now shows that there is another sleep disorder which is linked to PTSD: sleep apnea. Sleep apnea occurs when a person's breathing repeatedly stops and starts during sleep.

### *Here are the common signs and symptoms of sleep apnea*

- Loud snoring, which is usually more prominent in obstructive sleep apnea
- Episodes of breathing cessation during sleep witnessed by another person
- Abrupt awakenings accompanied by shortness of breath, which more likely indicates central sleep apnea
- Awakening with a dry mouth or sore throat
- Morning headache
- Difficulty staying asleep (insomnia)
- Excessive daytime sleepiness (hypersomnia)
- Attention problems
- Irritability

### *So how is sleep apnea related to PTSD in veterans?*

Research has shown that there are factors that overlap in both disorders which affect and aggravate each other. Overlapping factors include disturbed sleep in combat, excessive sleep deprivation, fragmented sleep, hyperarousal, and chronic stress. Although all of these symptoms contribute to the interaction between sleep apnea and

PTSD, the main culprits seem to be sleep deprivation and chronic stress. Studies have shown that patients exhibiting these symptoms tend to have increased frequency and length of apneic events. Research has also shown that as the severity of PTSD increases in a person, the chances of developing sleep apnea increases as well because of the interplay between the shared factors of the two disorders. Although in this blog, we focused on PTSD, sleep apnea is also associated with other forms of mental illness, click [here](#) to learn more.

The important takeaway message is that if you are a veteran suffering from PTSD, it is important to get a screening for sleep apnea. If you have undiagnosed sleep apnea, you could be suffering from symptoms that can be treated. Reports have also shown that receiving the appropriate treatment for sleep apnea can improve PTSD symptoms. It is also important to be screened for sleep apnea because if left untreated, sleep apnea can lead to the development of other health issues including:

- High blood pressure
- Stroke
- Heart failure, irregular heartbeats, and heart attacks
- Diabetes
- Depression
- Worsening of ADHD
- Headaches

Although sleep apnea is commonly associated in society with older, overweight individuals, the interplay with PTSD has a lot of younger, fit individuals being diagnosed with sleep apnea. At the end of the day, regardless of your demographics, if you are suffering from PTSD, it is important to ask your doctor for a screening for sleep apnea to prevent further complications of your health as well as potentially treat some of your current symptoms.

**Tags:** [PTSD](#), [Sleep Apnea](#)