

Depression and Anxiety



Depression affects many veterans, often intertwined with PTSD or other stressors such as physical injury, chronic pain, or social isolation. Symptoms include:

- **Persistent sadness** or **low mood**
- **Loss of interest** or pleasure in activities
- **Fatigue** and low energy
- **Feelings of worthlessness** or guilt
- **Difficulty concentrating** and making decisions
- **Suicidal thoughts** or behaviours

Depression can severely impact quality of life and functioning, requiring timely identification and treatment.

Depression

Depression is one of the most common mental health conditions among UK veterans, affecting around **1 in 5**, according to national studies. It often co-exists with other issues such as PTSD, chronic pain, or long-term physical health conditions, and may be triggered or worsened by the challenges of transitioning to civilian life.

Veterans may experience:

- **Persistent low mood or sadness**
- **Loss of interest in activities**
- **Fatigue or low energy**
- **Feelings of worthlessness or guilt**
- **Difficulty concentrating or making decisions**
- **Changes in appetite or sleep**
- **Thoughts of self-harm or suicide**

For some veterans, depression is rooted in **loss of purpose, isolation**, or unresolved trauma. Others may feel disconnected from society or experience **employment and financial struggles** that worsen their mental state. The “stiff upper lip” culture common in the military can discourage emotional openness, making it harder for veterans to seek help.

Left untreated, depression can severely impact quality of life and increase the risk of **substance misuse** and **suicidal behaviour**. Psychological therapies, such as **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)**, alongside peer support and in some cases medication, can be highly effective.

Support with Anxiety

Anxiety disorders are a common and significant mental health concern among UK veterans. They frequently co-occur with other conditions such as PTSD, depression, or adjustment difficulties, creating a complex web of emotional challenges. While feelings of anxiety are a natural response to stress, for many veterans these symptoms become **persistent and disruptive** in everyday civilian life.

Common symptoms include:

- **Ongoing worry** or a sense of dread
- **Irritability** and **restlessness**
- **Panic attacks**
- Physical symptoms such as muscle tension, **headaches**, or **digestive issues**
- **Trouble concentrating** or falling and **staying asleep**

For many veterans, anxiety is triggered by challenges faced after leaving the military — such as **job insecurity, difficulties reintegrating into civilian society**, or **concerns about health and family life**. In some cases, heightened anxiety is linked to **hypervigilance** — a survival mechanism developed in combat that becomes maladaptive in peaceful settings.

As a result, veterans may begin to **avoid crowded areas, public transport**, or **unfamiliar environments**, which can lead to social withdrawal and difficulty maintaining employment or relationships. These avoidance behaviours can reinforce isolation and make it harder to engage with support.

Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety is also common among veterans, manifesting as generalised anxiety disorder, panic disorder, or social anxiety. Veterans may experience:

- **Excessive worry** and fear
- Physical symptoms such as **rapid heartbeat, sweating**, and trembling
- **Avoidance of certain situations** or triggers linked to traumatic experiences
- **Restlessness** and difficulty relaxing

Anxiety can exacerbate other mental health problems and complicate recovery if left unaddressed.

Contributing Factors

Several factors contribute to the high prevalence of mental health issues in veterans:

- **Exposure to combat trauma** and life-threatening situations
- **Loss of military identity** and difficulty adjusting to civilian roles
- **Physical injuries** and chronic pain
- **Social isolation** and **strained relationships**
- **Stigma around mental health** within military culture, which may delay help-seeking

Support and Treatment in the UK

The UK offers several specialized services to support veterans facing mental health challenges:

- **NHS Veterans Mental Health Services:** Provide tailored assessment and treatment for PTSD, depression, anxiety, and related conditions.
- **Combat Stress:** A leading charity offering expert mental health care specifically for veterans, including residential treatment programmes.
- **Talking therapy and Counselling:** Psychological therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR), and trauma-focused therapies are effective in treating PTSD and mood disorders.
- **Peer Support Groups:** Veteran-led organizations foster connection and mutual support, helping reduce isolation and stigma.
- **Medication:** Antidepressants and anxiolytics may be prescribed alongside therapy when appropriate.

Importance of Early Intervention

Timely recognition and treatment of mental health conditions can improve outcomes significantly, reducing the risk of chronic disability, suicide, and social withdrawal. Encouraging veterans to seek help early and creating awareness about available resources remain key priorities.

Contact Us

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



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