



# PTSD & Sex

## Understanding the Effect of Trauma on Your Sex Life

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**VA**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
*PBM Academic Detailing Service*

## How Does PTSD Affect Sex?

PTSD makes it difficult to have close relationships. It can also make it hard to have an active sex life or enjoy intimacy.

Sexual problems are common in people with PTSD, regardless of the type of trauma experienced.

If violence in a relationship or a sexual assault does lead to PTSD, then sex can trigger strong memories and feelings.

## What are Sexual Problems?

Sexual problems can be physical and emotional:

- Trouble with erection, ejaculation, orgasm
- Low levels of sexual desire, arousal or pleasure
- Feeling disconnected or afraid during sex
- Risky or dangerous sexual behavior
- Pain during sex

## What Else Causes Sexual Problems?

Many factors cause sexual problems. Often there is more than one cause.

### PTSD Can Affect Couples in Many Ways



## Talk to Your Provider

It is normal to feel uncomfortable talking about sexual problems. Don't let this stand in your way. A healthy sex life is an important part of overall health. Sharing your concerns with your provider and your partner can lead to solutions.

### ***For PTSD, talk about:***

- Trauma-focused therapy for PTSD
- Talk therapy for sexual problems
- Couples therapy for PTSD

### ***For medication side effects, talk about:\****

- Decreasing to a lower, but still effective, dose
- Changing to a different medication
- Adding a medication to address side effects, including erectile dysfunction
- Seeing a specialist

**\*Remember: Talk to your provider before you change medication or try over-the-counter products**

## Things You Can Do

- ✓ Exercise and make healthy food choices
- ✓ Quit tobacco and cut back or stop drinking alcohol
- ✓ Control high blood pressure and diabetes
- ✓ Be kind to yourself and learn to deal with everyday stress

*"... it was really the impact that (PTSD) was having on my marriage that caused me to want to go get treatment. I didn't want to lose the one good thing I had left."*

Stacy L. Pearsall, Veteran  
U.S. Air Force

To hear Stacy's story go to:  
[www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/AboutFace](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/AboutFace)

**Veteran's Crisis Line**  
**1-800-273-TALK (8255) or**  
**Text - 838255**

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## Contact info: