From Combat to Car Collisions to Cancer: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Can Affect Anyone

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Many Americans think of combat veterans when they hear the term Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Certainly, wartime experiences can be deeply traumatic and require focused attention and treatment. However, men and women from all walks of life can develop PTSD in response to traumatic physical or emotional events.

Any traumatic experience can trigger PTSD. Common events include sexual abuse or sexual assault, physical assault, car crashes or natural disasters like tornadoes. Some people develop PTSD due to emotional events, such as a serious illness or the death of a loved one, or by witnessing something traumatic happen to someone else.

PTSD is a treatable mental health condition. It's also not uncommon. According to the National Center for PTSD, about 8 million U.S. adults have PTSD in any given year, and one out of every 13 people will have PTSD at some point in their lives.

People with PTSD are not "damaged," "crazy" or "weak." These messages are harmful because they can make people ashamed of their symptoms and hesitant to seek help. In fact, many factors that can lead to PTSD are out of a person's control.

What are the symptoms of PTSD?
Not everyone with PTSD has the same symptoms. However, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), some common thoughts and behaviors associated with PTSD are:

- **Re-living the moment**: This can include flashbacks, bad dreams and scary thoughts.
- **Avoiding people and places:** People may stay away from reminders of the event or feel numb, guilty, anxious or depressed.
- **Dissociating:** People may have out-of-body experiences or feel the world is "not real."
- **Being "on edge":** This may include being startled very easily, feeling tense, sleeping poorly or having angry outbursts.

It's important to speak with a healthcare professional to diagnose any medical condition. If you or someone you know has symptoms such as these, talk to your doctor or other healthcare provider about what to do next.

How is PTSD treated?
PTSD is most commonly treated with counseling, medications or both.

Counseling: Talking with a therapist can help relieve many symptoms of PTSD. In a treatment called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), a therapist helps people learn to think differently about the traumatic event and factors that cause negative emotions. The therapy may help people with PTSD begin to think more accurately, reduce distressing thoughts and better cope with intense feelings.

Counseling may also involve talking about the traumatic event over and over again so people learn to have less fear about their memories. Therapy can also help people with PTSD do things they have avoided because of their trauma, such as standing close to a stranger.

Medication: Psychiatrists or other doctors may prescribe antidepressants or other medications to help people with PTSD feel better. Your doctor can talk with you about your medication options.

Fortunately, PTSD often responds well to treatment, and most communities have a mental health professional qualified to treat PTSD and any related concerns.

To learn more about PTSD and local treatment options, call Smoky Mountain LME/MCO toll-free at 1-800-849-6127, 24 hours a day, or visit www.smokymountaincenter.com.