

## TREATMENT

Because of its wide array of symptoms, more than one form of treatment is often recommended. Together different treatment options can collectively target the spectrum of GWI-related difficulties.

The VA offers services to help address the medical, emotional, and memory difficulties. Pain rehabilitation programs, complementary and integrative health therapies, and medications can target pain. Psychotherapy can provide relief for mood and cognitive symptoms.

Effective treatment of other similar chronic pain conditions inform ongoing research. For instance, medications for fibromyalgia are being tested to see if they can also provide GWI symptom relief.

Promising results have also been found from integrating sleep interventions. Respiratory difficulties associated with GWI improve by the use of continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP).

The VA and researchers across the country are committed to continue to improve the help available to Gulf War Veterans.



## IF I THINK I HAVE GWI...

### COME TO THE VA FOR HELP!

Contact your local VA to inquire more about Gulf War Illness resources. Consider enrolling in the Gulf War Health Registry. Veterans can register without being enrolled in the VA's health care system. If new problems emerge, you can request additional registry exams.

The Gulf War Illness registry is:

- Free to eligible Veterans and there is no co-payment
- Not a disability compensation exam or required for other VA benefits
- Based on Veterans' recollection of service, not on their military records



To register call  
**1-877-222-VETS (8387)**

For more information visit  
[www.publichealth.va.gov/  
exposures/gulfwar/benefits/  
registry-exam.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/benefits/registry-exam.asp)

## GULF WAR ILLNESS

Explaining  
Unexplained  
Symptoms



VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

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## GULF WAR ILLNESS

Between 1990 and 1991, approximately 700,000 men and women served in the Gulf War in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. One in four returned experiencing several difficult, painful, and persistent symptoms that are medically unexplained.

This symptom collection is now referred to as: "Gulf War Syndrome," "Chronic Multi-symptom Illness," or simply "Gulf War Illness" (GWI).

Research informs our understanding of the causes and treatment options for GWI. Yet, this condition remains a major problem. Many of the afflicted remain unaware that GWI exists. For these Veterans the first step in obtaining help is being able to recognize its symptoms. Only then, can informed Veterans reach out to the appropriate places to receive available support.



## CAUSES

The exact causes for GWI are still debated. Yet, exposure to toxic chemicals has been identified as the most probable cause. These chemicals exposures were varied including pesticides, toxic nerve gases (e.g., sarin and cyclosporine), as well as antidotes to nerve gases (e.g., pyridostigmine bromide).

Research has also looked at depleted uranium, sand and airborne particulates, and oil-well fires and vaccines (e.g., anthrax, botulinium toxoid). However, investigation continues without concrete evidence of their role in GWI.

Some factors have been ruled out. We know that that GWI is not simply a stress-related condition or the result of a psychiatric illness.

## SYMPTOMS

GWI affects the brain both structurally and functionally. The effects of GWI also extend to autonomic regulation, neuroendocrine function, and immune function. Therefore, symptoms can be diverse and range in severity. Three diagnostic categories exist to classify symptoms: fatigue, pain, and mood and cognitive difficulties. Veterans suffering from GWI typically report symptoms of:

### FATIGUE

- Chronic fatigue
- Low energy
- Dizziness

### PAIN

- Joint pain
- Headaches
- Gastrointestinal issues
- Respiratory disorders
- Skin rashes or hair loss
- Tumors and brain cancer
- Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis

### MOOD AND COGNITIVE DIFFICULTIES

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Problems with memory
- Sleep disturbances

Diagnosis of GWI requires one or more symptoms from at least two of the three categories.

***You are not alone, thousands of Veterans suffer from GWI... there is hope.***