

“I was very fearful and shy with women. I didn’t kiss [my wife] for the first time until our honeymoon. I didn’t know what to do.”

-Male Veteran’s description of the impact of MST on his sexual health

LOCAL RESOURCES

Please attach label with local MST Coordinator contact information here.

SEXUAL HEALTH AFTER MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA (MST)

A Guide for Male Veterans

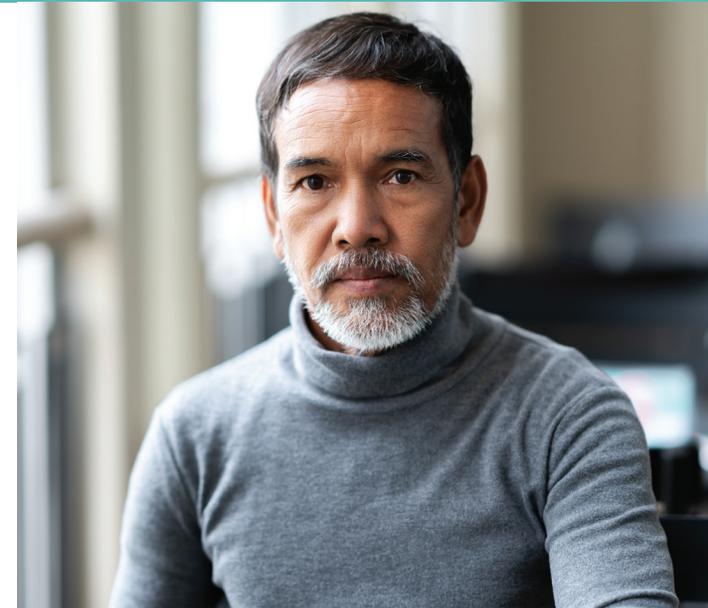
WHAT IS SEXUAL HEALTH?

Sexual health is your well-being in sexuality. It includes respectful relationships as well as pleasant, safe sexual practices. Healthy sex is **not** forced or violent. All people have a right to healthy sexuality (*adapted from the World Health Organization, 2018*).

RESOURCES

- VA MST website at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp
- Videos of men Veterans discussing MST at www.maketheconnection.net. Select “Conditions” and then choose “Effects of Military Sexual Trauma”
- Society for Sexual Medicine Q&A at <https://www.issm.info/sexual-health-qa/>
- Pandora’s Project at <https://pandys.org/>
- *Coping with Premature Ejaculation* by Metz & McCarthy
- *Coping with Erectile Dysfunction* by Metz & McCarthy
- *Invisible Men* by Addis
- *Rekindling Desire* by McCarthy & McCarthy
- *Seven Weeks to Better Sex* by Renshaw
- *The Sexual Healing Journey: A Guide for Survivors of Sexual Abuse* by Maltz

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You deserve to have a healthy and happy sexual life

VA is committed to helping Veterans recover from MST.



Choose VA

MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA (MST)

MST refers to sexual assault and/or sexual harassment that occur while you are in the military. Examples include:

- Pressure into sexual activities with threats, promises of better treatment, or physical force
- Unwanted sexual touching or grabbing
- Offensive remarks about one's body or sexual activities
- Threatening and unwelcome sexual advances
- "Hazing" experiences can also be MST

There are many types of perpetrator(s): Known or unknown to you; Male or female; Service members or civilians; Current or former intimate partners. MST can happen while you are on or off duty, and on or off base.

MEN'S SEXUAL PROBLEMS

DESIRE: Feeling low sexual desire or less interest in sex than before.

AROUSAL: Difficulty getting or keeping an erection. Erections that are less hard than before. Or not feeling mentally aroused.

ORGASM: Having an orgasm sooner than you want to (such as within one minute of beginning sex). Delayed orgasm. Or inability to have an orgasm during sex.

SATISFACTION: Being happy with one's sexual life

Other common problems include:

- Trauma/injury to the penis, testicles, scrotum, or anus
- Enlarged or painful prostate
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Urinary tract infections
- Problems urinating or controlling urination
- Curved penis (Peyronie's disease)

MST AND SEXUAL PROBLEMS

- Sexual problems are experienced by 18-33% of male Veterans
- Sexual problems are more common among male Veterans who have experienced MST. This may be due to unwanted sexual contact during MST, or feelings of shame or stigma about MST.
- It is common to freeze or be unable to fight back during MST. This does not mean you consented to the sexual trauma or enjoyed it (even if the perpetrator tells you this). This does not mean anything about your sexual orientation or sexual preferences.

EFFECTS OF MST ON SEXUAL HEALTH

- Having changes in sexual behavior, attitudes, or preferences
- Having more or less sex than before
- Anxiety about not being able to get or keep an erection during sex
- Feeling less masculine or lower self-esteem than before
- Feeling emotionally and physically distant from romantic partners
- Feeling different about or disconnected from one's body
- Feeling distracted during sex
- Having memories or images of unwanted sexual experiences during sex
- Being unable to say "no" or express sexual needs
- Having sex only after drinking or using substances
- Having feelings of guilt, shame, helplessness, or worthlessness
- Lack of control when thinking of sex
- Using sex to escape from negative feelings

All of these changes are normal, common reactions to MST. RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE.

GETTING HELP

VA offers **free and confidential** services to Veterans for mental and physical health conditions related to MST. This includes counseling and other forms of medical and mental health treatment. Sexual problems may be included in this free care.

Ask your VA healthcare provider for help if you have sexual problems. You can ask even if you are not sure if the problems were caused or made worse by MST.

You could say:

- "I am concerned about my sexual health."
- "I'm having problems with sexual intimacy."
- "I never want to have sex. It's causing problems in my relationship."



If you are having sexual problems, you are not alone. Many male Veterans report these problems. They benefit from treatment.