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## **Lifestyle Changes Recommended for PTSD Patients** Information from the National Center for PTSD

[www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)

People with PTSD need to take active steps to deal with their PTSD symptoms. Often these steps involve making thoughtful changes in your lifestyle. By making these changes, you can reduce your symptoms and improve your quality of life. Here are some positive changes you could make:

### ***Have more contact with other trauma survivors***

Other trauma survivors are a good source of understanding and support. You could join a survivors' organization. For example, Veterans may want to join a Veterans' organization. By having contact with others who have had similar experiences, you will no longer be isolated. You will also begin to break down any distrust of others.

It may be hard to take the first step and join a PTSD treatment group or other peer support group. You may have said to yourself, "What will happen there? Nobody can help me anyway." Many people with PTSD find it hard to meet new people. They have trouble trusting enough to open up to someone new. Yet it can also be a great relief to feel that you have taken positive action. You will learn that you are not the only one dealing with the types of feelings you have. In time you may also end up being friends with another survivor.

### ***Start exercising***

Walking, jogging, swimming, weight lifting, and other forms of exercise often reduce physical tension. It is important to see a doctor before starting to exercise. If your doctor gives the OK, exercise in moderation can help those with PTSD. Exercise may give you a break from difficult emotions. It may distract you from painful memories or worries. Perhaps most important, exercise can improve self-esteem. It may create feelings of personal control.

### ***Change neighborhoods***

Survivors with PTSD often think that the world is a very dangerous place. You may think it is likely that you will be harmed again. If you have PTSD, living in a high-crime area may confirm these beliefs and make you more fearful. If it is possible, move to a

## **Recommended Lifestyle Changes (continued)**

safer area. It may then be easier for you to rethink your beliefs about danger. You may be better able to trust that you will be safe.

### ***Volunteer in the community***

Most people need to feel as though they can contribute to their community. You may not feel you have anything to offer others, especially if you are not working. One way survivors can reconnect with their communities is to volunteer. You can help with youth programs, health services, reading programs, sports activities, building housing, and in many other ways.

### ***Stay away from drinking and drugs***

Sometimes trauma survivors turn to alcohol and drugs to help them cope with PTSD. While these substances may distract you from your painful feelings for a short time, relying on alcohol and drugs always makes things worse in the end. These substances get in the way of PTSD treatment and recovery. Rather than trying to beat an addiction by yourself, you may want to join a treatment program. It is often easier to deal with addictions if you can be around others who are working on the same kinds of issues.

### ***Invest more in personal relationships***

Most trauma survivors have a son or daughter, a wife or partner, or an old friend or work buddy. Make an effort to renew or increase contact with that person. This can help you reconnect with others, which in turn helps you cope with PTSD. It will increase the chances you have to feel good and have fun. Others can offer you emotional support as you change your habits and behaviors.