

PTSD and VA disability benefits for Vietnam vets

There are hundreds of thousands of Vietnam-era veterans struggling to cope with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). They experience flashbacks, depression, insomnia and serious anxiety as they also deal with the inevitable problems associated with advancing age.

According to a recent article in the [Wall Street Journal](#), 530,000 veterans were treated for PTSD at VA medical facilities through March of 2014, almost double the number in 2006. Although the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan account for about 25 percent of the increase, but most veterans seeking help for this frightening disability are from earlier wars, notably Vietnam.

In many cases, it has taken decades for these veterans to acknowledge that they have problems. They were ashamed, felt they didn't need help, or were too busy to attend to themselves, focusing instead on work and family. Nearly 40 years later, these veterans have memories and feelings that often overwhelm them. They hear missiles, see dead comrades and experience overwhelming guilt..

One VA psychologist quoted in the article noted that the full impact of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will not be seen for 30 or 40 years, when today's young veterans finally recognize that they cannot escape what happened to them while serving.

There's a reason why aging can trigger or intensify PTSD symptoms, according to the VA psychologist. Aging creates physical problems that limit people; they may become unable to drive, walk, go outside and face other limitations that isolate them and force them to confront what happened in the

past. They no longer have the same kinds of distractions they had when younger.

The VA recently changed criteria for determining whether a vet has PTSD and is thus eligible for disability benefits and other services. Veterans no longer need to provide documentation of a traumatic event that could have resulted in the disorder. This change has encouraged thousands of aging veterans and others who felt they were not eligible for services to apply for benefits because of their mental and emotional injuries from serving in Vietnam.