

# Innovative virtual reality exposure therapy shows promise for returning troops

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An article published in a forthcoming issue of the Journal of Traumatic Stress is one of the first to provide evidence of the effectiveness of exposure therapy with active duty military service members suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The study shows that virtual reality exposure therapy resulted in significant reductions in PTSD symptoms after an average of seven treatment sessions. Additionally, 62 % of patients reported clinically meaningful, reliable change in PTSD symptoms.

During the treatment the soldier repeatedly revisits the memory, and through the use of their imagination they safely access emotions related to the original [traumatic experience](#). Revisiting the memory while safely emotionally engaged, reduces anxiety, and allows the engagement process to be comfortably repeated. Lead author Dr. Greg Reger, "We know that lengthy military deployments in stressful environments with exposure to multiple, potentially traumatic events can lead to the desire to emotionally 'unplug.' By using multi-sensory [virtual reality](#) that can be customized in real time, the provider can help activate the memory with relevant sights, sounds, vibrations, even scents that resemble aspects of the event that is haunting them."

A clinical trial with Vietnam veterans and World Trade Center survivors has shown that virtual exposure therapy is an innovative and effective form of treatment. The current research extends those findings to the population of military service members returning from deployments to Iraq or Afghanistan with PTSD.

Reger, "It is possible that virtual reality exposure therapy would provide a more appealing treatment option to a young, technologically savvy generation of service members and veterans. In addition, it is possible that a treatment option like virtual reality exposure would be viewed by some service members as less stigmatizing than traditional treatment approaches. If accurate, virtual reality exposure therapy might provide us with the opportunity to treat service members and veterans who may not otherwise seek help."

**More information:** This study will be published in a forthcoming issue of *The Journal of Traumatic Stress*.

Provided by Wiley

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