

Severely injured vets may need ongoing emotional care

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Mental health problems still significant after 2 years, study finds.

(HealthDay)—U.S. veterans who suffered major limb injuries in combat showed little improvement with mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the two years after receiving treatment for their wounds, researchers report.

Their pain levels showed the most improvement three to six months after their initial hospitalization and then leveled off, according to the study, which is scheduled for presentation Thursday at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Pain Medicine in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

"Our research confirms that chronic daily pain ... continues to be a burden for limb-injured servicemen, that post-traumatic stress is a far more prominent feature of recovery than in other chronic pain populations and that returning to a meaningful role functioning in their

lives is challenging for many," study leader Dr. Rollin Gallagher, deputy national program director for pain management in the Department of [Veterans](#) Affairs, said in an academy news release.

Gallagher and his colleagues conducted phone interviews with nearly 300 veterans who suffered major combat-related limb injuries. Nearly half had lost limbs. The interviews were done every three months for two years, beginning after the veterans' initial hospitalization.

At various points during the interview period, nearly 14 percent of the veterans reported [generalized anxiety disorder](#), 14 percent reported depression and 5 percent had [suicidal thoughts](#). Nearly 46 percent reported a low level of [PTSD](#), and an additional 12 percent reported a high level of PTSD.

Pain levels immediately improved in the six months after initial hospitalization but did not show any further improvement over the remainder of the two-year study period, the study found.

The findings suggest that severely injured veterans require ongoing care to help them cope with the [pain](#) and trauma of their injuries, said Gallagher, who is also a clinical professor of psychiatry and anesthesiology at the University of Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia VA Medical Center.

Data and conclusions presented at meetings typically are considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed medical journal.

More information: The American Psychiatric Association has more about [military mental health](#).

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