

Sleep apnea treatment eases nightmares in vets with PTSD: study

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Photo courtesy: U.S. Army

For those with both post-traumatic stress and the sleep disorder, sticking with CPAP therapy may help.

(HealthDay)—For military veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and sleep apnea, treatment with continuous positive airway pressure, or CPAP, reduces their nightmares, a new study finds.

Researchers reviewed the medical records of U.S. veterans who had been treated in a VA medical center [sleep clinic](#) between 2011 and 2012. The investigators looked at the average number of nightmares per week before treatment and up to six months after CPAP was prescribed for the veterans.

The use of CPAP led to a significant reduction in the number of nightmares, which was most connected to how well veterans complied with the treatment.

"Patients with PTSD get more motivated to use CPAP once they get [restful sleep](#) without frequent nightmares, and their compliance improves," principal investigator Dr. Sadeka Tamanna, medical director of the [sleep disorders](#) laboratory at G.V. (Sonny) VA Medical Center in Jackson, Miss., said in an American Academy of Sleep Medicine news release.

The findings were recently published online in the journal *Sleep* and presented at the annual meeting of the Associated Professional Sleep Societies, in Baltimore.

"One out of six veterans suffers from PTSD, which affects their personal, social and productive life," Tamanna said. "Nightmares are one of the major symptoms that affect their daily life, and prevalence of [sleep apnea] is also high among PTSD patients and can trigger their nightmares."

CPAP, which is a common treatment for sleep apnea, helps keep the airway open by providing a stream of air through a mask that is worn during sleep. PTSD symptoms such as nightmares usually start soon after a traumatic event but may not show up until months or years later, according to the National Center for PTSD of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

More information: The U.S. National Institute of Mental Health has more about [post-traumatic stress disorder](#).

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