COMBAT STRESS

You have experienced a dangerous and stressful time. Even though you have returned home, you may now be experiencing, or may experience later some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have witnessed or been involved in highly stressful and life threatening situations.

Sometimes the stress reactions appear immediately. Sometimes they appear hours, days, weeks, or even months later. They may last a few days, a few weeks, or a few months, and, occasionally longer.

Occasionally, the events are so painful that professional assistance may be necessary. This does not mean you are crazy or weak but rather that your experiences were too overwhelming to handle without help and support.

"Taking care of our own is one of our Corps' abiding core principles. As our Marines return from combat, commanders must ensure that they are well prepared to successfully meet the challenges involved in returning from deployment and reuniting with their loved ones."

M.W. Hagee
Commandant

MCCS
MARINE & FAMILY SERVICES

Publication date 8/04

COMMON REACTIONS FOLLOWING COMBAT

- Emotional Reactions
- Physical Reactions
- Mental Reactions
- Behavioral Reactions

COMBAT STRESS

Emotional Reactions

- Initial euphoria, relief
- Guilt about surviving or not having suffered as much as others
- Anxiety, fear, guilt, worry
- Feelings of helplessness, inadequacy, being overwhelmed
- Pervasive concern about well being of loved ones
- Vulnerability
- Loss of sense of power, control, well being, self-confidence, trust
- Shame or anger over vulnerability
- Irritability, restlessness, super alertness, impatience, agitation
- Anger, blaming (anger at source, anger at those exempted, anger at those trying to help) or anger "for no reason at all"
- Frustration
- Cynicism, negativity
- Mood swings, emotional "attacks or pangs"
- Despair, grief, sadness
- Feelings of emptiness, loss, hopelessness, decreased trust of others
- Reawakening of past trauma or painful experiences
- Apathy, diminished interest in usual activities
- Feelings of isolation, detachment, estrangement, "no one else can understand"
- Denial or constriction of feelings, numbness
- "Flashbacks", intrusive memories of the event, illusions
- Recurrent dreams of the situation

Physical Reactions

- Vague body complaints
- Fatigue
- Sleep disturbances
- Pounding heart, fast or irregular heartbeat, increased blood pressure, sweating
- Trouble getting breath, irregular breathing
- Feeling of tightness in throat, stomach, chest
- Feeling a "lump in the throat"
- Chest pain
- Heavy feeling in arms or legs
- Numbness or tingling in parts of the body
- Lower back pain
- Soreness in muscles
- Feeling of weakness in parts of the body
- Hot or cold spells
- Faintness, dizziness
- Exaggerated startle response
- Trembling
- Headaches
- Nausea, upset stomach, diarrhea, constipation
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Increase in allergies, colds, flu
- Menstrual changes

Mental Reactions

- Poor concentration
- Mental confusion, slowness of thinking
- Forgetfulness
- Memory loss (complete or partial)
- Inability to make judgments and decisions
- Inability to appreciate importance or meaning of current events or information
- Poor judgment
- Loss of appropriate sense of reality (denial of reality, fantasies to counteract reality)
- Intrusive thoughts, memories, mental pictures of the event; "flashbacks"
- Preoccupation with the event
- Repetitive, obsessive thoughts
- Over-generalization, over-association with the event
- Loss of objectivity
- Rigidity
- Confusion regarding religious beliefs/value systems; breakdown of meaning and faith
- Self criticism over things done/not done during combat
- Awareness of own and loved ones' mortality

Behavioral Reactions

- Jumpiness
- Hyperactivity
- Workaholic
- Reckless behavior, accident proneness, apparent carelessness in tasks
- Outbursts of anger, arguments, or aggressiveness
- Difficulty returning to normal activity level
- Worried look, rigid posture, nervous actions
- Repetitive behaviors, compulsions
- Staring into space
- Withdrawal, social isolation, "distancing"
- Inability to express self verbally or in writing
- Increased use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco, food
- Avoidance of activities or places that arouse recollection of stressful event
- Family and relationship problems
- Disruption of work, school, social relationships and roles
- Excessive use of sick leave
- Sexual problems