



How to Detect and Treat Sleep Disorders in PTSD

Overview

- ✓ Insomnia, nightmares, and sleep apnea affect ~90% of patients with PTSD,¹ and are:
 - a) Linked with a worse course of PTSD, alcohol use, and suicidality;² and
 - b) Resistant to PTSD treatments and can even reduce their efficacy³
- ✓ Thus, sleep disturbances that co-occur with PTSD may require direct intervention⁴
- ✓ [Behavioral sleep treatments](#) are brief, effective, and reduce PTSD symptoms,⁵⁻⁹ and hence might be a workable first step for patients reluctant to initiate PTSD treatment

Insomnia

- ✓ Trouble falling and/or staying asleep, along with daytime dysfunction
- ✓ Insomnia may be maintained by a fear of sleep in some trauma patients¹⁰
- ✓ [Screening Tool](#) → 3- or 7-item [Insomnia Severity Index](#)^{11,12}
- ✓ [First-Line Treatment](#) → CBT for Insomnia (CBT-I)¹³
 - Multicomponent approach (*sleep hygiene is not sufficient on its own*¹⁴)
- ✓ [Other Options](#) → Self-Guided Insomnia Treatments
 - [Improve Your Sleep – Free Self-Help Workbook](#)
 - [CBT-i Coach – Free App](#) (use with face-to-face treatment or self-help workbook)
 - [List of Other Web-Based Treatment Programs for Insomnia](#)

Nightmares

- ✓ Vivid, disturbing dreams that cause awakenings, and may or may not replicate trauma
- ✓ Rarely reported and therefore often untreated¹⁵
- ✓ [Screening Tool](#) → 5-item [Nightmare Disorder Index](#)¹⁶
- ✓ [First-Line Treatment](#) → Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT)^{17,18}
- ✓ [Other Option](#) → Exposure, Relaxation, and Rescripting Therapy (variation of IRT)^{17,19}

Obstructive Sleep Apnea ([OSA](#))

- ✓ Repeated collapse of airway during sleep that disrupts breathing and fragments sleep
- ✓ Most common type of sleep-disordered breathing, yet often undiagnosed and untreated
- ✓ [Screening Tools](#) → 4- or 8-item [STOP-Bang](#),²⁰ or 10-item [Berlin Questionnaire](#)²¹
 - Objective sleep testing is needed for diagnosis (especially in vets with PTSD²²)
- ✓ [First-Line Treatment](#) → Positive airway pressure (PAP) therapy
 - [PAP Desensitization](#) is often necessary to improve adherence

Provider Training and Education Resources

- ✓ [Free CBT-I Online Training – CBTIweb](#) (includes CBT for nightmares)
- ✓ [3-Day CBT-I Training – UPenn](#)
- ✓ [General Sleep Education – American Academy of Sleep Medicine](#)

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