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# PTSD And Clinical Hypnotherapy

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## A Military Approach



Clinical reports over the past one hundred years have proven that hypnotherapy is an effective modality for the treatment of PTSD in combat personnel.

From the Great Wars, to Vietnam, to Korea, it has shown its efficacy at combatting operational stress injuries.

In 1917, Sir Grafton Elliot-Smith MD and Professor Tom Hatherley Pear at the Military Hospital in Maghull, Liverpool, wrote that: “Hypnotic treatment, when used with skill, discretion and discrimination, has its place in the treatment of shell shock...in the acute and chronic stages.”

During World War Two, US Army psychiatrists turned to clinical hypnotherapy to heal the worst cases of combat fatigue, with huge success. The techniques they adopted form the bedrock of clinical hypnotherapy today.

The US psychiatrists identified predispositions to PTSD which led to one million Americans being ruled out of the draft. Nearly thirty years before, Elliot-Smith and Hatherley Pear has also surmised that those who developed shell shock were somehow predisposed to it.

Dr William Brown, the medical officer in charge of Craiglockhart Hospital for Neurasthenic Officers during WW1, said all his shell shocked patients were suffering from dissociation, or a splitting of the mind, which caused symptoms like loss of memory, voice, hearing or even the ability to walk. “By hypnotising such a patient, and allowing him to recall the circumstances of his injury, evacuating the repressed fear, it is possible to reassociate the lost powers. Even if he has been paralysed, movement will occur in his limbs. A complete cure is often made.”

The ‘epidemic’ of acute psychiatric casualties after The Battle of the Somme nearly paralysed the British Army. In 1916 and 1917, 24,000 shell shocked casualties were sent back to Great Britain. Four receiving centres successfully used clinical hypnotherapy and psychotherapy to help the men overcome the trauma they had suffered. But by the time of the Battle of Passchendaele, the British government had adopted a personal blame culture, and restricted the numbers being sent back from the trenches, claiming the men were just being weak. The epidemic was arrested!

Fast forward 100 years and all the knowledge of the benefits of clinical hypnotherapy, gleaned from those conflicts and others, is beginning to resurface. Individual charities in the UK are privately referring veterans to clinical hypnotherapists, and the VA in the US has now employed clinical hypnotherapists, after the huge success of a pilot programme there.



Clinical hypnotherapy is not an “alternative” mental health therapy. Rather, it has been proven to be the “original brief therapy” for PTSD! Clinical hypnotherapy techniques are able to rapidly reduce or even eliminate PTSD symptoms, without the need for drugs of any kind, and help people rebuild their lives and get off disability benefits.

PTSD is recognised as a subconscious injury. Using clinical hypnotherapy a practitioner is able to help a sufferer access his or her own subconscious mind, gain insight into the

triggers of their symptoms, and thereby eliminate the core reasons for their stress reactions.

Clinical hypnotherapy is endorsed by the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association and the British Medical Council. The British Psychological Society has declared hypnotherapy a proven therapy for stress, anxiety, insomnia and pain.



Clinical hypnotherapy combines psychoanalysis and progressive relaxation, and works by taking a PTSD sufferer into such a deep state of relaxation that it is possible to detach the stimulus (the trigger) from the emotional response (fear/anger) in the body, without exacerbating the trauma. The brain can then be “reframed” with a new response, like reprogramming a hard drive. This can happen in just one session!



In WW1 and WW2, even deeply entrenched psychoses were turned around by a handful of clinical hypnotherapy sessions. Damaged men, who looked to be hopeless cases, suddenly got better, and doctors began to see the patterns behind the PTSD cases. It is believed that military personnel who have been forced to develop strong coping mechanisms in childhood, due to abuse or neglect, are more likely to develop PTSD.

Clinical hypnotherapy went on to be used in the Korean war and the Vietnam war to try to help serving military personnel with PTSD, and also to remove all pain from injuries sustained in theatre. As far back as the American civil war it is documented that doctors were using hypnosis to block pain in operations. That continued through to Vietnam. In Changi prison in Singapore military prisoners used hypnosis to perform essential surgery.

# The PTSD Formula

Clinical hypnotherapists have come to understand that neurotic sicknesses follow a formula: predisposition, plus stress, equals neurosis. Predisposition cocks the mechanism and stress pulls the trigger. Those with dysfunctional or abusive childhoods, previous depressions, a history of substance abuse are more at risk from PTSD after combat exposure, because spiritual wounds remain unresolved.

By using clinical hypnotherapy as a method to evacuate fear and anger, before military personnel are placed in traumatic situations, PTSD numbers would dramatically lessen. Training military chaplains to use basic hypnotherapy methods post-trauma could also prevent Post Traumatic Stress injuries becoming Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.



Despite the huge proven success of clinical hypnotherapy techniques, PTSD treatments today still focus on medication, and conscious cognitive therapies which can be blocked by the subconscious mind. Traumatic memories are often locked away by the the subconscious to protect the body. But while the memory is locked away, the body's physical reaction to that memory is not. Military personnel then suffer unexplained reactions which will continue until the subconscious memory is unlocked. Given the waiting lists for psychiatric consultations, even basic help can often come too late. With sufferers needing dozens of hours of talk therapy, resources are limited. When people with PTSD do get help, but do not receive relief from their symptoms, they can lose hope and commit suicide, believing there is no cure. But as history, and previous cases, has proven, there is a cure, and it is clinical hypnotherapy, and it can be achieved in just a handful of sessions. Sessions can even be conducted online, to ensure minimal disruption for PTSD sufferers.

# Studies Of Clinical Hypnotherapy For PTSD

**Brom et Al 1989** - [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/20583795\\_Brief\\_psychotherapy\\_for\\_posttraumatic\\_stress\\_disorders](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/20583795_Brief_psychotherapy_for_posttraumatic_stress_disorders) - The claim that **hypnosis does work to relieve PTSD symptoms** is supported by numerous studies comparing groups of PTSD patients receiving hypnosis with groups receiving interventions such as systematic desensitization.

**David Spiegel 1990** - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/2211565> - A study of Vietnam veterans found a **history of physical abuse in childhood** has been shown to be **strongly associated with dissociative symptoms** later in life. Vietnam veterans with PTSD have higher than normal hypnotizability scores on standardized tests.

**Van Etten and Taylor 1998** - <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/35192> - Psychological therapies, including hypnotherapy, had **significantly lower drop-out rates than pharmacotherapies**.

**Abraamovitz, Barak, Ben-Avi and Knobler 2008** - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00207140802039672> - **There was a significant effect of the hypnotherapy treatment with PTSD symptoms** as measured by the Posttraumatic Disorder Scale.

**Bisson and Andrew 2009** - Hypnosis has been applied as a **useful intervention in relieving PTSD**.

**Lesmana, Suryan, Jensen and Tiliopoulos 2009** - A large effect **in favor of hypnosis-based** (especially manualized abreactive hypnosis) **treatment for PTSD was found**.

**Abramovitz and Lichtenberg 2010** - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18307128> - **A New Hypnotic Technique for Treating Combat-Related Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Prospective Open Study**, International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, 58:3, 316-328.

**Shakibaei, Harandi, Gholamrezaei, Samoei and Salehi 2008** - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18307128> - The hypnotherapy group showed significantly lower pain ratings than the control group and reported a significant reduction in pain from baseline. There was a **significant reduction in trauma reexperience scores in the hypnotherapy group** but not the control group. The findings **support the efficacy of hypnotherapy in the management of both pain and reexperiencing of trauma in burn patients**.

**David Spiegel - 2011** - Vietnam grief work using hypnosis - new strategy **using hypnosis** for assisting some of these veterans in **coming to terms with their psychological and physical losses**. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00029157.1981.10403281>

## Articles

**Hypnotism helped shell shock victims in the Great War.** <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/03/hypnotism-shell-shock-first-world-war>

**The Army Materiel Command Wellness division sees the huge benefits of hypnosis and utilizes it regularly** - [https://www.army.mil/article/180434/health\\_professional\\_presents\\_hypnosis\\_facts](https://www.army.mil/article/180434/health_professional_presents_hypnosis_facts)

# A Final Word From Those Who Are Suffering.....

“.... We saw gruesome things, horrific things. We had a lot of close friends die. We did things you don't think affect you. But after a couple of years things start building up. You try to find your own way, to deal with the symptoms, but they gradually take hold of you and destroy your life.”

“.....I went missing for 3 days. They found my car on a hill, all burned out with my blood all over it. The ISIS flag was painted on the bonnet. They found me three days later in my Boxers trying to flag down a car, with stab wounds on my body and cigarette burns on my eyelids. I had no recollection of any of it.”

“.....I saw the mental health people. They said I had anger issues. But I don't. I am a nice bloke. I am just broken.”

“....The CBT and EMDR therapy hasn't worked. I am still sinking. I have had character changes which have now become part of who I am.”

“.....I haven't worked for the past 4 years. I can't. I don't know when the panic attacks will happen or why. It freaks employers out and makes me so anxious. I have had treatments with Combat Stress for anger management but nothing is working.”

“.... I have a daughter I haven't see for 7 years because of my condition. My wife has told her I am dead. I am not alone. There are many like me.”

“.....I don't see anyone from the military. I am isolated. I cut myself off. I don't want anyone to see me like this.”

“.....I have developed a fear of driving. I don't know why. I drove in the military but now I can't get in the vehicle. It makes me physically throw up. It is ruining my life.”

“.... I am not bubbly and happy anymore. I keep wanting to go back to that person but I can't. I don't know how to get back to her.”

“.....I was covered in blood. I was covered in other people's blood. It was so disgusting. I instantly started to think: “Was that my fault? Could I have prevented that?” I was brand new to the army. I didn't know what was happening.”

“.....I am just lost. A lost soul. I can't get the buzzing out of my ears. I don't know why it is there. I see the explosion over and over again like it is a memory trapped in my head. I just want to get it out.”

“.... I went to the local town and bought a load of medication. Then I went home and took the lot. I had never had any thoughts of suicide before.”

“....The Marines didn't want me anymore. I loved the Marines. I was good at my job or I thought so. But they just threw me out. Now I have no idea what to do. I lost everything.”