WELCOA
ONLINE BULLETINS

BetterSafe!

WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR FAMILY'S SAFETY

Dealing With TRAUMA

FRIGHTENING EVENTS CAN HAVE LASTING EFFECTS

Imagine seeing a fellow soldier killed by a roadside bomb. Or searching through the rubble of the World Trade Center for survivors. Or being sexually assaulted. You're probably even trying to push those images out of your head as you read this. Some people find it impossible to stop thinking about traumatic experiences. They may have recurring nightmares. Fear and anxiety could begin to interfere with every aspect of life.

It was called Soldier's Heart in the Civil War. Since then, it's gone by such names as Shell Shock, Battle Fatigue and Post-Vietnam Syndrome. Now we call it post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD. And we know that it affects people other than those who've been to war.

Anyone who's been through an experience that involved physical harm or the threat of it can develop PTSD. Causes include mugging, rape, torture, child abuse, car accidents and natural disasters.

Symptoms Of PTSD

After a trauma, you may startle easily and be constantly on guard. You might become emotionally numb or lose interest in things you used to enjoy. You may have trouble feeling affectionate. You could become irritable, aggressive or even violent. It's common to avoid situations that remind you of the incident and to have trouble sleeping.

These normal responses to horrific events usually become better over time. Most people don't forget what has happened to them, but they can eventually put the incident in the back of their minds. They carry on with their day-to-day lives and don't go on to develop PTSD.

For some people, however, the symptoms don't fade away. Their anxieties become so overwhelming that they are no longer able to focus on their daily lives.

"Not all traumatic responses are PTSD," says Dr. Meena Vythilingam of the Mood and Anxiety Disorders Program at NIH's National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). "It becomes PTSD in a small subgroup, when these symptoms persist over a month, cause extreme distress or interfere with the ability to function at work, school or home."

The Effects Of PTSD

People with PTSD can't stop thinking about the traumatic experience during the day and have nightmares about it when they sleep. Some people actually relive the event by vividly re-experiencing the sounds,

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

(Continued from previous page)

smells or feelings of the original trauma. These are called flashbacks.

Memories, thoughts, feelings or even flashbacks of a trauma can be triggered by ordinary things, such as a door slamming or a car backfiring on the street. To avoid being reminded of the trauma, people with PTSD might refuse to talk about it and stop going places that remind them of it.

PTSD is considered a chronic anxiety disorder. It affects both men and women. Men are more likely to be exposed to traumatic events, and about 5-6% of them develop PTSD. Women are more likely to develop PTSD after being exposed to a traumatic event, however, with 8-14% developing PTSD. The chance of developing PTSD is highest after sexual trauma.

"PTSD is a brain disorder. It is not caused by a moral weakness or a character flaw," Vythilingam explains. "There are well-documented changes in the function and structure of the brain regions mediating fear and memory in PTSD."

If you don't get treatment, PTSD can persist for years. In fact, it never fades for about 30% of those who aren't treated. PTSD goes hand in hand with depression. People with PTSD also often abuse drugs and alcohol.

Treating PTSD

Vythilingam says that there is no one treatment for PTSD. Studies have found that both medications and psychotherapy (talk therapy), during which a therapist helps you to face your fears, can be effective.

New strategies for developing better PTSD treatments will come from a better understanding of the chemical and structural changes in the brain that are associated with PTSD.

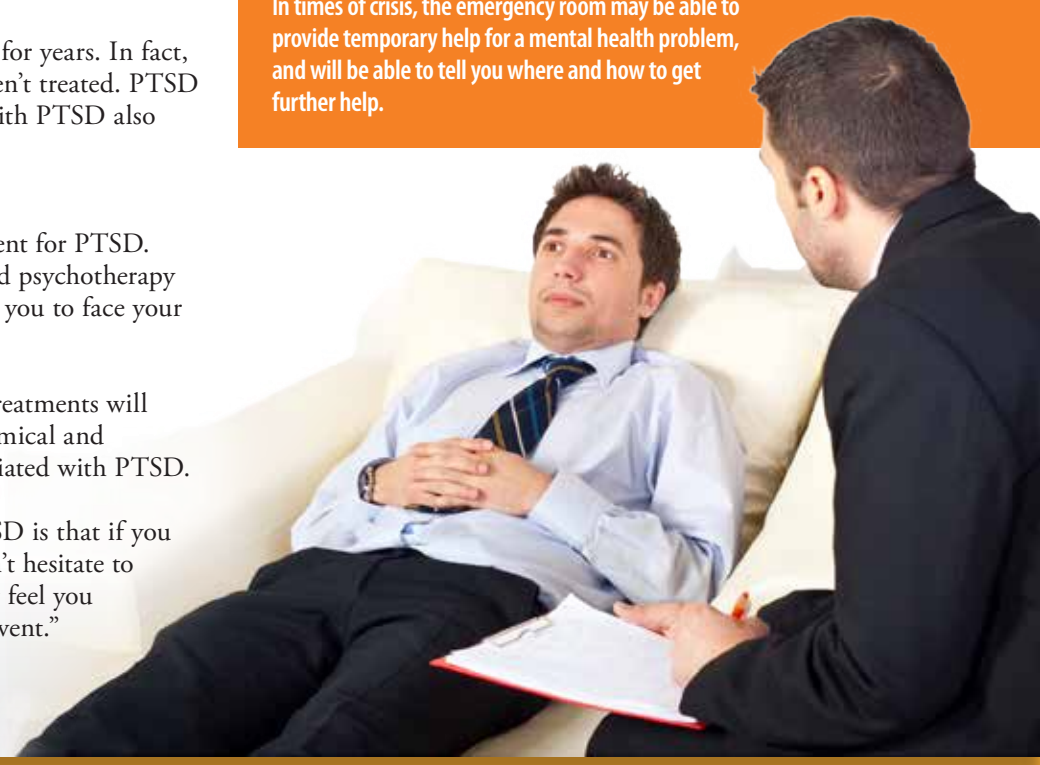
The important thing to remember about PTSD is that if you suspect you or someone you know has it, don't hesitate to seek help. Vythilingam says, "You should not feel you should have to walk alone after a traumatic event."

Getting Help

If you need help dealing with PTSD or another mental illness and don't know where to turn, talk to someone you trust who has experience in mental health. Ask their advice on where to seek treatment. Here are the types of people and places that will make a referral or provide diagnostic and treatment services:

- Family doctors
- Mental health specialists, such as psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers or mental health counselors
- Religious leaders/counselors
- Health maintenance organizations
- Community mental health centers
- Hospital psychiatry departments and outpatient clinics
- University or medical school-affiliated programs
- State hospital outpatient clinics
- Social service agencies
- Private clinics and facilities
- Employee assistance programs
- Local medical and/or psychiatric societies

In times of crisis, the emergency room may be able to provide temporary help for a mental health problem, and will be able to tell you where and how to get further help.



WELCOA ONLINE BULLETINS

DAY IN DAY OUT

WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR LIFESTYLE

Chew On This

Teeth help us bite, chew, speak clearly and smile. Even babies need healthy teeth. But teeth need proper care to stay healthy and strong. It's never too early to start kids on the path to good dental health.

Diet plays a role in tooth decay. When you eat or drink foods that contain sugar, germs in your mouth use the sugar to make acids. Over time, the acids can cause tooth decay, or cavities. Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease in children, yet it's mostly preventable.

Although baby teeth eventually fall out, it's still important to take care of them. They play an important role in the mouth. "Baby teeth of course are used to chew, but they also guide growth of the jaw bones and create room for permanent teeth to come in," says Dr. Tim Iafolla, a dental health expert at the National Institute of Health (NIH).

"Start cleaning your baby's mouth even before the first teeth come in, so your baby gets used to having his or her mouth cleaned. Wipe gums with a clean, soft cloth," says Iafolla. "When teeth come in, clean them twice a day with a cloth or soft brush, as they are immediately susceptible to tooth decay and plaque."

How To Protect Baby Teeth

One important way to protect baby teeth is not putting your baby to bed with a bottle. Milk, formula and juice all contain sugar. If sugary liquids stay on your baby's teeth too long, it can lead to tooth decay. If you give your baby a bottle to keep at bedtime or to carry around between feedings, fill it only with water.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

WELCOA
ONLINE BULLETINS

DAY IN DAY OUT
WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR LIFESTYLE

(Continued from previous page)

"It's important to catch tooth decay early," Iafolla says. He recommends bringing your child to the dentist by age one. The dentist can tell if teeth are coming in properly, detect early signs of decay, and give you tips on caring for your child's teeth.

Surefire Strategies To Protect Your Baby's Teeth

The best defense against tooth decay is fluoride, a mineral found in most tap water. If your water doesn't have fluoride, ask a dentist about fluoride drops, gel or varnish.

Start using fluoride toothpaste at about age two. Iafolla recommends using just a pea-sized drop of fluoridated toothpaste until kids have the ability to spit and rinse.

Young kids need help brushing their teeth properly. Try brushing their teeth first and letting them finish. You might try using a timer or a favorite song so your child learns to brush for two minutes. Continue to supervise brushing until your child is seven or eight years old.

Have kids brush their teeth at least twice daily: in the morning, at bedtime, and preferably after meals.

Offer healthy foods and snacks to children. If kids do eat sugary or sticky foods, they should brush their teeth afterward.

Also ask your child's dentist about sealants—a simple, pain-free way to prevent tooth decay. These thin plastic coatings are painted on the chewing surfaces of permanent back teeth. They quickly harden to form a protective shield against germs and food. If a small cavity is accidentally covered by a sealant, the decay won't spread because germs trapped inside are sealed off from their food supply.

By following these tips, you can help your children develop healthy dental habits for life.

Caring For Kids' Teeth

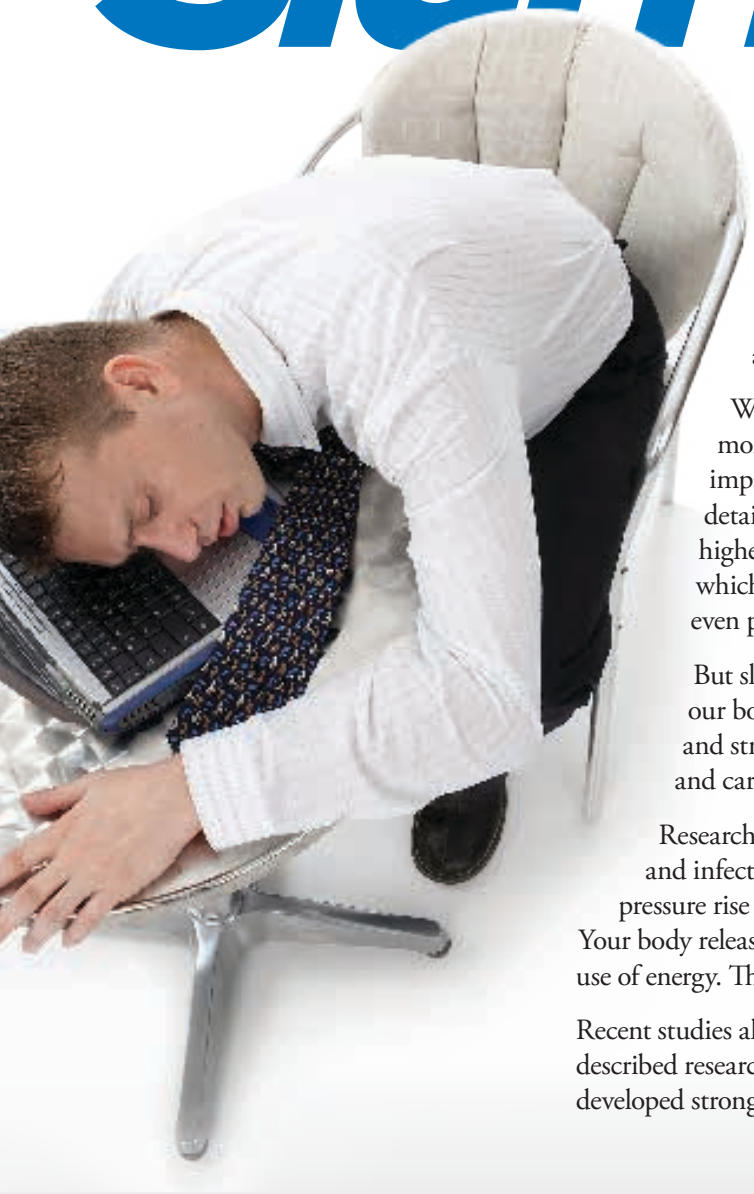
- Check and clean your baby's teeth with a cloth or soft toothbrush.
- Don't put your baby to bed with a bottle. Or, if you do, fill it with water.
- Take your child to the dentist by age one.
- Start putting a drop of fluoride toothpaste on your child's toothbrush at about age 2.
- Feed your child healthy foods.
- Ask your dentist about sealants to protect children's teeth.
- Brush teeth at least twice every day, and preferably after meals.

WELCOA
ONLINE BULLETINS

take CHARGE

WELCOA'S ONLINE SELF-CARE BULLETIN

The Benefits Of Slumber



We have so many demands on our time—jobs, family, errands—not to mention finding some time to relax. To fit everything in, we often sacrifice sleep. But sleep affects both mental and physical health. It's vital to your well-being.

Of course, sleep helps you feel rested each day. But while you're sleeping, your brain and body don't just shut down. Internal organs and processes are hard at work throughout the night.

When you're tired, you can't function at your best. Sleep helps you think more clearly, have quicker reflexes and focus better. Indeed, loss of sleep impairs your higher levels of reasoning, problem-solving and attention to detail. Tired people tend to be less productive at work. They're at a much higher risk for traffic accidents. Lack of sleep also influences your mood, which can affect how you interact with others. A sleep deficit over time can even put you at greater risk for developing depression.

But sleep isn't just essential for the brain. "Sleep affects almost every tissue in our bodies," says Dr. Michael Twery, a sleep expert at NIH. "It affects growth and stress hormones, our immune system, appetite, breathing, blood pressure and cardiovascular health."

Research shows that lack of sleep increases the risk for obesity, heart disease and infections. Throughout the night, your heart rate, breathing rate and blood pressure rise and fall, a process that may be important for cardiovascular health. Your body releases hormones during sleep that help repair cells and control the body's use of energy. These hormone changes can affect your body weight.

Recent studies also reveal that sleep can affect the efficiency of vaccinations. Twery described research showing that well-rested people who received the flu vaccine developed stronger protection against the illness.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

WELCOA
ONLINE BULLETINS

take CHARGE

WELCOA'S ONLINE SELF-CARE BULLETIN

(Continued from previous page)

A good night's sleep consists of four to five sleep cycles. Each cycle includes periods of deep sleep and rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, when we dream. "As the night goes on, the portion of that cycle that is in REM sleep increases. It turns out that this pattern of cycling and progression is critical to the biology of sleep," Twery says.

Although personal needs vary, on average, adults need seven to eight hours of sleep per night. Babies typically sleep about 16 hours a day. Young children need at least 10 hours of sleep, while teenagers need at least 9 hours. To attain the maximum restorative benefits of sleep, getting a full night of quality sleep is important, says Twery.

Getting Quality Sleep

- Go to bed the same time each night and get up the same time each morning.
- Sleep in a dark, quiet, comfortable environment.
- Exercise daily (but not right before bedtime).
- Limit the use of electronics before bed.
- Relax before bedtime. A warm bath or reading might help.
- Avoid alcohol and stimulants such as caffeine late in the day.
- Avoid nicotine.
- Consult a health care professional if you have ongoing sleep problems.

Be Aware Of Sleep Disruptors

Sleep can be disrupted by many things. Stimulants such as caffeine or certain medications can keep you up. Distractions such as electronics—especially the light from TVs, cell phones, tablets and e-readers—can prevent you from falling asleep.

As people get older, they may not get enough sleep because of illness, medications or sleep disorders. By some estimates, about 70 million Americans of all ages suffer from chronic sleep problems. The two most common sleep disorders are insomnia and sleep apnea.

People with **insomnia** have trouble falling or staying asleep. Anxiety about falling asleep often makes the condition worse. Most of us have occasional insomnia. But chronic insomnia—lasting at least 3 nights per week for more than a month—can trigger serious daytime problems such as exhaustion, irritability and difficulty concentrating.

Common therapies include relaxation and deep-breathing techniques. Sometimes medicine is prescribed. But consult a doctor before trying even over-the-counter sleep pills, as they may leave you feeling unrefreshed in the morning.

People with sleep apnea have a loud, uneven snore (although not everyone who snores has apnea). Breathing repeatedly stops or becomes shallow. If you have apnea, you're not getting enough oxygen, and your brain disturbs your sleep to open your windpipe.

If you have mild sleep apnea, you might try sleeping on your side, exercising or losing weight to reduce symptoms. A CPAP machine, which pumps air into your throat to keep your airway open, can also help. Another treatment is a bite plate that moves the lower jaw forward. In some cases, however, people with sleep apnea need surgery.

Good sleep is critical to your health. To make each day a safe, productive one, take steps to make sure you regularly get a good night's sleep.

WELCOA
ONLINE BULLETINS

To Your HEALTH

WELCOA'S ONLINE GENERAL WELLNESS BULLETIN

On Sound Footing

The Health Of Your Feet

Your feet are pretty small, considering they have to support the entire height and weight of your body. But they can cause big problems. So pay some attention to your feet.

"Feet don't get any respect," says Dr. Marian T. Hannan, who studies foot disorders at the Institute for Aging Research at Hebrew SeniorLife. "They're sort of the Rodney Dangerfield of the human body."

Each step you take involves a remarkably intricate network of bones, muscles, tendons and ligaments. That complexity—combined with all the weight they carry—accounts for why feet can be so prone to problems, including bone fractures, arthritis and plantar fasciitis, a swelling of the thick band of tissue that runs along the bottom of the foot.

The Effects Of Foot Pain

If left untreated, foot problems may worsen. Eventually, the pain could interfere with your ability to do even the most basic things like walking up stairs or down the street. If pain alters the way you walk, it can lead to pain in your knees, hips and back as well. These problems can multiply, limiting your activity and affecting your quality of life.

Several things can contribute to foot pain or numbness. Sports and physical activity can cause your feet to hurt or become numb. Going too far, too fast or not warming up properly before exercise can set you up for painful or numbing injuries.

Excess weight puts extra stress on your feet. Poorly fitting shoes and other footwear are common causes of foot problems as well.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

WELCOA
ONLINE BULLETINS

To Your HEALTH
WELCOA'S ONLINE GENERAL WELLNESS BULLETIN

(Continued from previous page)

Health problems can also affect the feet. Lack of feeling in your feet could be a sign of a serious illness, such as diabetes or a nerve disorder. See your health care provider if you have unusual numbness in your feet or foot pain that is severe, comes on suddenly, or doesn't improve with simple measures such as rest or over-the-counter pain medications.

"The good news is that most foot disorders are either treatable or modifiable," Hannan says. "The first thing that you can do is notice and keep track of it to see if there's a pattern to it." Once you figure out when you feel pain or numbness, she explains, talk to an expert who can help.

Walk Away With These Tips

How you walk and move affects your feet. Part of that is inherited. "Not only do our feet look like our parents' but we also walk like our parents," Hannan says. But you can modify your gait—either with training or by changing shoes or using shoe inserts or pads.

You can help keep your feet healthy by wearing comfortable, well-fitting shoes. Wash your feet regularly (especially between your toes), wear clean socks and try to rotate your shoes to give them time to air out.

"The more you exercise your feet, the better the blood flow is to the feet, and that's important for general foot health," Hannan says.

Walking is a great way to exercise your feet. You can also try specific foot exercises. Sit down and rotate your ankles in one direction, then the other. In bare feet, sit in a chair and curl your toes, then spread them out. This helps stretch and strengthen your feet to help you balance.

Seeing what someone's foot looks like is incredibly informative, Hannan says. "I think we're going to be seeing a lot more health care providers paying attention to the feet," she predicts.

Foot Health Tips

- Use appropriate, well-fitting footwear.
- Wear clean socks.
- Keep your feet clean.
- Exercise your feet.
- If you're overweight, try to lose weight.
- Avoid standing long hours.
- When exercising or playing in sports, build up gradually.
- If you have diabetes, examine your feet regularly for problems like cuts, bruises, blisters, sores or swelling.