Treatment for PTSD symptoms may improve cardiovascular health

Traditional risk factors like smoking and diabetes have long been targeted in cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevention efforts. Now there is growing recognition of the impact of psychological risk factors such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on cardiovascular health.

A study of Vietnam War Veterans with PTSD found a doubled risk of death from heart disease (Bascarino, 2008). The same research found that each 5-point increase in the PTSD symptom score corresponded with a 20% increase[1] in cardiac disease mortality. Another study of 1,000 U.S. civilian women found similar results. Each additional PTSD symptom increased the risk of incident coronary heart disease by 17% (Kubansky, 2009).

Behaviors linked to PTSD, such as decreased activity levels, poor medication adherence, increased smoking and substance use, and disturbed sleep, also can impact cardiovascular health. As noted by the National Center for PTSD, we need to "…explore the impact of reducing PTSD symptoms on CVD risk[2]…"

Non-medication PTSD treatment for Security Health Plan members now available

In a study conducted at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System (Ostacher, 2021), patients with PTSD symptoms treated with Freespira, a digital therapeutic treatment, reported both good adherence and significant symptom reduction after treatment:

- 82% treatment response rate (*response (RCI) was defined as a 13 point or more CAPS-5 score reduction*) at 6-months.
- 77% protocol adherence rate

Medications and psychotherapy—though effective for some people—do not address a physiological factor underlying PTSD symptoms known as carbon dioxide hypersensitivity, which leads to breathing irregularities.

Freespira, an FDA-cleared, at-home treatment for PTSD symptoms**,** works by providing real-time analysis and feedback of respiratory rate and exhaled carbon dioxide levels, training users to normalize breathing in a 28-day program.

Published studies on Freespira show high rates of patient satisfaction, effectiveness, and adherence— and Freespira is now covered for eligible Security Health Plan members.

As the National Center for PTSD paper suggests: "targeting PTSD… could dramatically reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease, improving the function, quality of life, and longevity of millions of people. [3]"

Find out more or make a referral at **freespira.com/for-providers.**

[1] Kubzansky, L. D., Koenen, K. C., Jones, C., & Eaton, W. W. (2009). **A prospective study of posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms and coronary heart disease in women.** *Health Psychology, 28*, 125-130. doi:10.1037/0278-6133.28.1.125

[2] https://www.ptsd.va.gov/publications/rq_docs/V28N1.pdf

[3] https://www.ptsd.va.gov/publications/rq_docs/V28N1.pdf