

# Reoccurring PTSD After Initial Treatment

A significant proportion of military personnel experience a return of nightmares after initial PTSD treatment, with studies indicating that **nearly three-quarters (approx. 70-75%)** of service members report persistent or recurring nightmares even after broader PTSD treatment has concluded.

However, the rate of return or persistence depends heavily on the individual's overall PTSD status post-treatment:

- Among service members who no longer met the full criteria for a PTSD diagnosis after treatment, a much lower percentage, **only about 13%**, continued to report nightmares.
- For those who still had residual PTSD post-treatment, **over half (around 52%)** continued to experience nightmares.

Nightmares are one of the most common and persistent symptoms of PTSD in military populations, often proving resistant to general PTSD treatments. This highlights the need for specific, targeted interventions for nightmares, such as Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT) or Exposure, Relaxation, and Rescripting Therapy (ERRT), which have shown effectiveness in reducing nightmare frequency and severity, though follow-up studies have noted that frequency can sometimes increase again over time if not specifically targeted with ongoing care.

While initial PTSD treatments significantly reduce nightmares in military personnel, many still experience them; studies show that for those who no longer meet PTSD criteria post-treatment, about 13% still have nightmares, but for those still symptomatic, around 52% continue to have them, highlighting nightmares' persistent nature, though they are often more responsive to treatment than insomnia.

## Key Findings on Nightmare Persistence:

- **Significant Reduction:** For service members who no longer meet PTSD criteria after treatments like Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), the percentage of those still having nightmares drops dramatically from ~69% at baseline to about 13%.
- **Persistence in Treatment-Resistant Cases:** Among those who *still* have PTSD symptoms after treatment, nearly half (around 52%) continue to experience nightmares.

- **More Responsive Than Insomnia:** Nightmares tend to improve more with PTSD treatment than insomnia, which remains a very common and persistent issue even after PTSD symptoms remit, according to research.

#### **Why Nightmares Persist:**

- **Trauma-Related Nightmares (TRNs):** These specific nightmares are a core symptom of PTSD, linked to combat and deployment, and can be resistant to general PTSD therapies.
- **Interfering with Healing:** Persistent nightmares disrupt sleep, which is crucial for healing, and can worsen other PTSD symptoms.