



# Veterans and Parkinson's Risk: *Three Things to Know*

In serving their country, military veterans may be familiar with certain risks, such as injuries and stress. But many may not be aware that military service can increase risk for Parkinson's disease (PD) and other conditions. Not all veterans develop Parkinson's disease. But according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), at least 110,000 United States veterans are living with PD. In those who get Parkinson's, the disease could show up years or even decades after military service. And the first signs may be mood or sleep changes, which are common among veterans and may not be recognized as an early part of PD. Here are three things to know about Parkinson's risk if you're a military veteran.



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### Certain military exposures increase risk for Parkinson's.

Some environmental factors linked to PD are more common among veterans. One example is Agent Orange, an herbicide that was used to clear plants and leaves for military operations in Vietnam and the Korean demilitarized zone. Another is trichloroethylene (TCE), a chemical that removes grease, which contaminated the water supply at Camp Lejeune in the 1980s. Still another is traumatic brain injury (TBI), which can be caused by sudden impact to the head, with or without loss of consciousness.

→ Read more about other Parkinson's risk factors such as aging, acting out dreams while asleep, having a family member with Parkinson's and Ashkenazi Jewish descent in our [Better Brain Health guide](#).

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### Knowing your risk can help you take positive actions.

Many veterans qualify for free or low-cost health care and services, including regular checkups and medication, at the VA. The VA recognizes Parkinson's as a "presumptive" illness linked to Agent Orange, Camp Lejeune contaminants, and moderate to severe TBI. This means that veterans with PD who were exposed to these environmental factors do not have to prove a connection between their service and Parkinson's to receive VA health care and disability benefits.

Most veterans do not get Parkinson's disease. But it's important to know your risk and make your health a priority. Watching for new symptoms — especially PD symptoms such as tremor, slowness, stiffness or acting out dreams — and seeing your doctor regularly can help you stay on top of your health journey. Many also say understanding their risk helps them take positive steps to care for themselves as best they can through regular exercise, healthy eating and participating in research.

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### Veterans can help prevent Parkinson's disease.

Veterans — regardless of health status or location of military service — have valuable experiences to contribute to research. Many veterans say that volunteering for research is a way they can continue to serve, well beyond military duty. Research studies are exploring military and environmental links to Parkinson's and other brain diseases to better understand, treat and ultimately prevent them.

One of these studies, the Parkinson's Progression Markers Initiative (PPMI), welcomes veterans both with and without Parkinson's. PPMI follows participants over time to learn how and why disease comes on and to develop ways to diagnose and treat it earlier and, ultimately, prevent disease. [Join the study that could change everything.](#)