

USACHPPM Technical Guide 242

Battle Fatigue/Combat Stress Reaction Prevention: Leader Actions



In combat, battle fatigue (BF)/combat stress reaction is inevitable, but battle fatigue casualties (BFCs) are not. BFCs can be restored to duty quickly if rested close to their units and treated positively. This requires planning and coordination. Leadership plays the key role in preventing BFCs.

Good Leadership Counts

- There may be one BFC per three to eight wounded.
- Highly-trained and cohesive units have the fewest BFCs.
- Leader actions speed the return of BFCs to duty.
- Failure to act can lead to a BFC's permanent loss to the unit.

Leader Actions to Prevent Battle Fatigue/Combat Stress Reaction Casualties

- Build unit cohesion and unit pride.
- Help soldiers have stable home fronts.
- Keep soldiers physically fit.
- Conduct tough, realistic training.
- Cross-train in key areas.
- Enforce sleep discipline.
- Plan for personal hygiene.
- Preserve soldiers' welfare, safety, and health.
- Reduce uncertainty.
- Enforce individual preventive medicine measures.

Factors Contributing to Battle Fatigue/Combat Stress Reaction Casualties

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| ▪ Domestic worries | ▪ Inability to strike back |
| ▪ New personnel | ▪ Information vacuum |
| ▪ Novelty of war | ▪ NBC weapons threat |
| ▪ Casualties | ▪ Sleep loss |
| ▪ Lack of mobility | ▪ Physical exhaustion |
| ▪ Surprise attacks | ▪ Dehydration, hunger |

U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine

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Management of Battle Fatigue/Combat Stress Reaction

Duty Battle Fatigue/Combat Stress Reaction (Keep with buddies)

Symptoms: Any amount or kind of BF/combat stress reaction symptoms that does not endanger the soldier or others or interfere with the unit's current mission.

Actions: Rest, feed, and keep on duty.

Rest Battle Fatigue/Combat Stress Reaction (Rest in parent unit)

Symptoms: Warning signs that indicate the soldier is too much of a risk or burden to stay with his or her own buddies.

1. Section cannot provide safe, stable environment for recovery.
2. Soldier is not disruptive or dangerous.
3. No urgent medical evaluation is needed.

Actions: Assign less critical duty in safer area for 6-36 hours of rest and work.

Heavy Battle Fatigue/Combat Stress Reaction (Take to aid station or medical company)

Symptoms: Warning signs

1. Soldier is disruptive or potentially dangerous.
2. Soldier could need urgent medical treatment for illness or injury.
3. Warning signs do not improve.

Actions:

1. Take to aid station or medical treatment facility.
2. Maintain contact or visit soldier if not returned in hours.
3. Welcome soldier back into unit upon return (65-85 percent return to original unit in 1-3 days; 15-20 percent to some duty in 1-2 weeks).

Additional Leader Resources:

GTA 21-3-4, *Battle Fatigue, Normal, Common Signs, What to Do for Self and Buddy.*

GTA 21-3-5, *Battle Fatigue, 'More Serious' Signs; Leader Actions.*

GTA 21-3-6, *Battle Fatigue, Company Leader Actions and Prevention.*

USACHPPM Technical Guide (TG) 240, *Combat Stress Behaviors.*

USACHPPM TG 241, *Battle Fatigue/Combat Stress Reaction.*

