

# Assessment for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder



## Screening

New  
Recommendation

When screening for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), we suggest using the **Primary Care PTSD Screen for DSM-5 (PC-PTSD-5)**.<sup>1</sup>

- The **PC-PTSD-5** is a five-item screener which begins by asking the patient if they have experienced a traumatic event(s) and continues with five additional yes/no questions about the patient's trauma history.<sup>2</sup>
- No screening measure or cut point should be the sole basis for diagnosis.<sup>1</sup>
- There may be variations in cut scores among different subpopulations (e.g., with women, active duty service members, and in samples with greater racial/ethnic diversity). Therefore, the applicability of the measure and the cut score to the population that will be screened should be considered.<sup>1</sup>
  - Download the **PC-PTSD-5** from the National Center for PTSD: <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/documents/pc-ptsd5-screen.pdf>

## Diagnosis

New  
Recommendation

For confirmation of the diagnosis of PTSD, we suggest using a validated structured clinician-administered interview, such as the **Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS-5)** or **PTSD Symptom Scale-Interview Version (PSS-I)**.<sup>1</sup>

- The **CAPS-5** is a 30-item structured interview that assesses the 20 DSM-5 PTSD symptoms, the onset and duration of symptoms, subjective distress, and the impact of symptoms on functioning. The interview takes 45–60 minutes to administer.<sup>3</sup>
  - Request the **CAPS-5** measure from the National Center for PTSD: <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/ncptsd-instrument-request-form.asp>
- The **PSS-I** is a 24-item semi-structured interview that assesses the frequency and intensity of 20 DSM-5 PTSD symptoms as well as distress, interference, onset, and duration of symptoms. The interview takes 15–25 minutes to administer.<sup>4</sup>
  - Request the **PSS-I** from the author directly: [foa@penmedicine.upenn.edu](mailto:foa@penmedicine.upenn.edu).

## Detecting Changes in Symptoms

New  
Recommendation

To detect changes in PTSD symptom severity over time, we suggest the use of a validated instrument, such as the **PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5)**, or a structured clinician-administered interview such as the **CAPS-5**.<sup>1</sup>

- The **PCL-5** is a 20-item self-report measure that is completed by patients prior to a session and interpreted by a clinician. The measure takes 5–10 minutes for a patient to complete.<sup>5</sup>
- Download the **PCL-5** from the National Center for PTSD: <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/adult-sr/ptsd-checklist.asp>

## Resources



**Military OneSource** provides 24/7 support and information on housing, financial, legal, medical, and psychological services.

- State-side: 800-342-9647
- Overseas: 800-342-9647
- Collect: 484-530-5908

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil>



**988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** and the associated **Military/Veterans Crisis Line** provides free and confidential support for individuals in crisis. If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, call or text 988 or <https://988lifeline.org>; you can also press 1 or text 838255 to chat live with a counselor focused on military and veteran callers (<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net>).



**inTransition** offers specialized coaching and assistance for active duty service members, National Guard members, reservists, veterans, and retirees to help callers with their mental health care as they transition between systems of care.

- State-side: 800-424-7877
- Overseas: 800-748-81111 (in Australia, Germany, Italy, Japan, and South Korea only)

<https://www.health.mil/inTransition>

## References

- 1 Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense. (2023). *VA/DOD clinical practice guideline for the management of posttraumatic stress disorder and acute stress disorder*. (Version 4.0). <https://www.healthquality.va.gov/guidelines/MH/ptsd/index.asp>
- 2 Prins, A., Bovin, M. J., Kimerling, R., Kaloupek, D. G., Marx, B. P., Pless Kaiser, A., & Schnurr, P. P. (2015). *Primary care PTSD screen for DSM-5 (PC-PTSD-5)*. National Center for PTSD. <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/screens/pc-ptsd.asp>
- 3 Weathers, F. W., Blake, D. D., Schnurr, P. P., Kaloupek, D. G., Marx, B. P., & Keane, T. M. (2013). *The clinician-administered PTSD scale for DSM-5 (CAPS-5)*. National Center for PTSD. <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/adult-int/caps.asp>
- 4 Foa, E. B., McLean, C. P., Zang, Y., Zong, J., Rauch, S., Porter, K., Knowles, K., Powers, M. B. & Kauffman, B. (2016). Psychometric properties of the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms Scale Interview for DSM-5 (PSSI-5). *Psychological Assessment*, 28(10), 1159–1165. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0000259>
- 5 Weathers, F. W., Litz, B. T., Keane, T. M., Palmieri, P. A., Marx, B. P., & Schnurr, P. P. (2013). *The PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5)*. National Center for PTSD. <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/adult-sr/ptsd-checklist.asp>

Note: This content is derived from the 2023 VA/DOD Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Acute Stress Disorder.



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