5 Common Health Problems Facing Military Veterans

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(Newswire.net -- September 8, 2017) -- Members of our military put their lives on the line for the safety of our country. During the course of their active service, they often see and experience horrendous things that we can only imagine — including injury, loud blasts, exposure to chemicals and more.

Unfortunately, military veterans often return home with a number of health issues that are the result of their time in the service. For example, as the American Psychological Association notes, of the 1.7 million veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, 20 percent now suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or major depression. In addition to struggling with their mental health, some veterans are also left with physical injuries as the result of their service. For example, consider the following examples:

Mesothelioma

Mesothelioma is a type of asbestos-related cancer that affects the lining of the lungs, abdomen and/or heart. In the early 20th century, members of the U.S. military used a lot of products that contained asbestos; this includes members of the Navy who were exposed in boiler rooms and on submarines, and the Army who encountered asbestos during demolition work, in shipyards and in their barracks. Approximately one-third of people in the United States who were diagnosed with mesothelioma are veterans.

Other Lung Issues

Veterans do not have to be exposed to asbestos to develop lung problems; the air in military zones is often filled with harmful chemicals from items that are set on fire — this includes plastics, metal, paint and more. Working in poorly ventilated areas that have a lot of vehicle exhaust, breathing in dust in harsh desert conditions and being exposed to chemical warfare can all contribute to veterans’ lung issues. Veterans may notice chest pain, difficulty breathing and a stubborn cough that will not go away.

Hearing Loss

From being on board loud military aircraft and working near jet engines to firing guns, exposure to blasts from weapons and more, serving in the military is a noisy experience. In addition, chemical exposure — for example, being around jet fuel — may cause damage to the hearing since it is easily absorbed into the skin. Exposure to loud noise often causes tinnitus or hearing loss. In the case of tinnitus, veterans may report hearing a constant ringing sound in their ears, even when they are in a totally quiet environment — this can prevent them from concentrating or sleeping.

Autoimmune Disorders

Veterans are especially prone to developing autoimmune disorders, which is when the immune system goes haywire and decides to attack healthy tissue in the body instead of germs and bacteria. The immense amount of stress that members of the military endure put them at an increased risk for developing an autoimmune disorder; this is especially true for veterans who have been diagnosed with PTSD. PTSD can cause tangible changes in the body that can lead to autoimmune issues including inflammatory bowel disease, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis and many others.

Chronic Pain

Eighty-two percent of the veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom are reporting suffering from some type of chronic pain. This may be due to a physical injury that took place while they were serving, or it may also be linked to a traumatic brain injury or PTSD.