

**USACHPPM Technical Guide 241**  
**Combat Operational Stress Reaction (COSR) ("Battle Fatigue")**



Soldiers can experience combat and operational stress in combat and in other dangerous, stressful missions. It is essential that soldiers and their leaders know the physical and mental signs of normal, common combat operational stress, as well as the warning signs of COSR signs.

**Common Physical Signs**

- Tension:** Aches, pains  
**Jumpiness:** Easily startled, fidgety, trembling  
**Cold sweats:** Dry mouth, pale skin, eyes hard to focus  
**Heart:** Pounding; may feel dizzy or light-headed  
**Breathing:** Rapid, out-of-breath; fingers and toes start to tingle, cramp and go numb  
**Stomach:** Upset; may vomit  
**Bowels:** Diarrhea or constipation  
**Bladder:** Frequent urination, urgency  
**Energy:** Tired, drained; takes an effort to move  
**Eyes:** Distant, haunted "1000-yard" stare

**Common Mental and Emotional Signs**

- Anxiety:** Keyed up, worrying, expecting the worst  
**Irritability:** Complaining; easily bothered  
**Attention:** Poor; unable to focus or remember details  
**Thinking:** Unclear; trouble communicating  
**Sleep:** Troubled; awakened by bad dreams  
**Grief:** Crying for dead or wounded  
**Guilt:** Self-blame for errors or what had to be done  
**Anger:** Feeling let down by leaders or others in unit  
**Confidence:** Low; loss of faith in self and unit

Many soldiers have these signs, yet still fight well and do all their essential duties. The signs are normal responses to combat danger, uncertainty and the environment. They become warning signs if prolonged, excessive, or a sudden change from individual's usual style.

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*U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine*  
ATTN: MCHB-TS-H, 5158 Blackhawk Rd, Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21010-5403  
410-436-4656 or 1-800-222-9698  
<http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/dhpw/>

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### Warning Signs Requiring Quick Assistance

- Startles at any sound, movement
- Extreme restlessness
- Trembling or cowering
- Loss of feeling in limbs
- Loss of muscle movement (total or partial)
- Spaced-out appearance, actions
- Very rapid speech
- Uncontrolled outbursts
- Reckless actions
- Poor hygiene
- Memory loss
- Speech impaired or lost
- Inability to sleep or fear of sleep
- Hallucinations
- Extreme mood changes
- Withdrawal
- Depression
- Apathy
- Hysterics or frantic, panicky behavior

### Buddy and Leader Actions

- Even serious combat COSR signs can improve in minutes if handled correctly on the spot.
- If the soldier's behavior endangers the mission, control the situation.
- If the soldier is upset, talk calmly and try to enlist the soldier's cooperation; assign a simple task.
- Make a quick check for physical injuries.
- Reassure the soldier that recovery from COSR can occur quickly.
- If the soldier is no longer reliable:
  - Unload the soldier's weapon.
  - Take the weapon only if you are seriously concerned.
  - Physically restrain only if necessary for safety.
- Get the soldier to a safer place.
- Don't leave the soldier alone.
- Get the soldier to drink water, eat, and sleep if tired.
- Warm, cool, and/or dry the soldier if needed.
- Assign the soldier to appropriate, realistic tasks and, eventually, to a return to duty.
- Get a medic's advice if signs could be from injury, drugs, or disease.
- Get the soldier to talk about what happened.
- Evacuate to aid station if the soldier does not improve, but reassure the soldier of recovery and return to duty.
- If unable to evacuate, ensure the soldier's safety while continuing to give reassurance and support.



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