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Antidepressant Use Soars Among Deployed

Stars and Stripes | June 12, 2008

For the first time in history, a sizable and growing number of U.S. combat troops are taking daily doses of antidepressants to calm nerves strained by repeated and lengthy tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to a report in [Time Magazine](#).

In its June 16 cover story, the magazine reports that the medicines are intended not only to help troops keep their cool but also to enable the already strapped Army to preserve its most precious resource: soldiers on the front lines.

Citing the Army's fifth Mental Health Advisory Team report, using an anonymous survey of U.S. troops taken last fall, *Time* wrote that about 12 percent of combat troops in Iraq and 17 percent of those in Afghanistan are taking prescription antidepressants or sleeping pills to help them cope.

Escalating violence in Afghanistan and the more isolated mission have driven troops to rely more on medication there than in Iraq, military officials told *Time*.

The Army estimates that authorized drug use splits roughly fifty-fifty between troops taking antidepressants -- largely the class of drugs that includes Prozac and Zoloft -- and those taking prescription sleeping pills such as Ambien, *Time* wrote.

The magazine noted that the high number of soldiers on antidepressants is mirrored by that of the general population.

Time also reported that there are sharp divisions among military physicians: Some have said that the effects of using such prescriptions on soldiers in war zones are not adequately understood, while others contend that using prescriptions for mild depression symptoms avoids costly removals of soldiers from the fight.

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