



# Military: Troop ailments, from backs to breathing, swell

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By [Kelly Kennedy](#), USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — More than 190,000 active-duty servicemembers sought treatment for back injuries in 2010 — roughly 70,000 more than did in 2001, before the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began, according to a [Defense Department](#) morbidity report released Friday.

The number of servicemembers who saw a doctor for adjustment disorders increased from 33,987 in 2001 to 79,500 in 2010.

And 140,000 more servicemembers had signs and symptoms of respiratory problems in 2010 than did the previous year.

Mental disorders possibly caused by combat stress increased by about 170,000 cases from 2001 to 2010. And an increase of epilepsy — from 1,514 cases in 2001 to 2,620 in 2010 — may come as a result of an increase in traumatic brain injuries, which has been connected to the disorder

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But some of those numbers — such as a jump from 9,688 diagnosed "all other neurologic conditions" in 2001 to 32,667 in 2010, or the increase from 65,520 cardiovascular cases in 2001 to 91,013 in

2010 — may seem more mysterious.

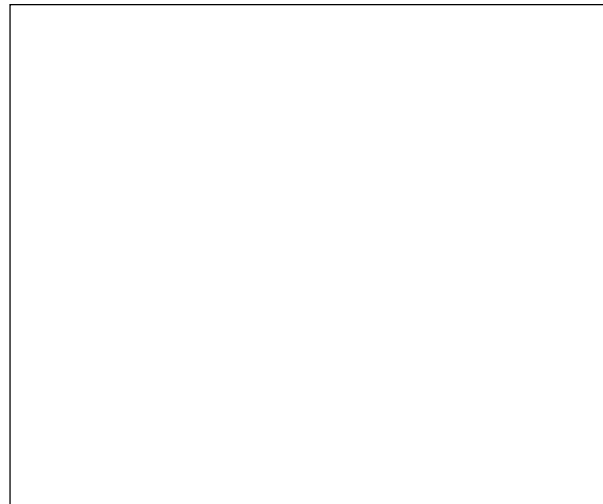
Doctors, researchers and environmental experts, both civilian and military, believe open burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan may be partly to blame. Most of the pits in Iraq — one of which burned 240 tons of Styrofoam, plastic water bottles, diesel engines and computer parts along with other trash every day — have been shut down since Congress demanded it, but new ones have been created to get rid of troop waste in Afghanistan.

And, civilian studies have shown that fine particulate matter increases cases of respiratory and cardiovascular disorders. The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) regulates industrial particulate matter for just that reason, but the troops have breathed in everything from cement-factory exhaust to leaded gasoline fumes in the [Middle East](#).

The number of pregnancy complications also increased from 13,755 in 2001 to 24,540 in 2010.

"As noted many times in the past, the

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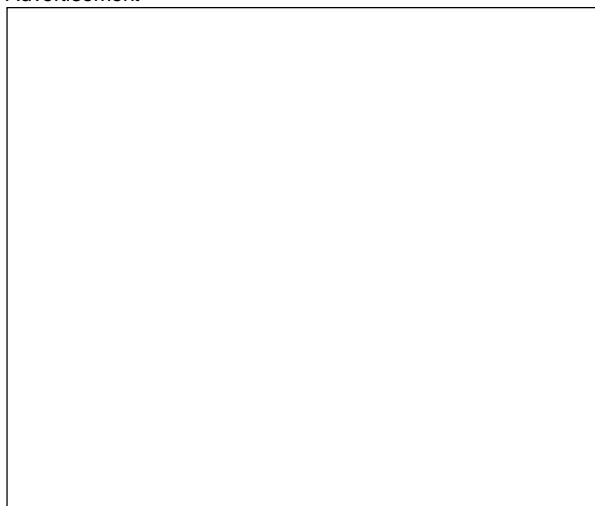
prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of injuries of all types — particularly, back injuries — and the detection, characterization and management of mental disorders — including substance disorder and deployment stress-related disorders, e. g., PTSD — should have the highest priorities for military medical research, public health and force health protection programs," states the Defense Department's newly released *Medical Surveillance Monthly Report*

The report also cites the "scarce resources for diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and disability compensation."

The numbers include active-duty servicemembers who went to a military health clinic at a permanent base anywhere in the world and do not include evaluations performed in Iraq or Afghanistan.

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