

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

(Easy Reading Version)



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What is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and who is at risk?

When something overwhelming and scary happens to a person, we call it a “traumatic event.” Some examples are car accidents, being abused, watching someone else be abused, war, sexual assault, or natural disasters. These events can happen once in a person’s life or many times. Not everyone who experiences trauma gets PTSD. Events that are more severe or last longer put a person at greater risk of getting PTSD.

What happens during a traumatic event?

During stress our body turns on a “fight or flight” response. When faced with something scary, our body focuses only on safety. Our brain turns off memory, feelings, and thinking. This is why people don’t always remember traumatic events very well. Feelings and memories from the trauma can then appear when the person does not expect them. This can cause problems.

What are the symptoms of PTSD?

There are three main types of symptoms:

- **Re-experiencing:** The person may have nightmares or memories of the event that keep coming back. They may see images or memories of the event over and over again. They may feel upset or react to things that remind them of the trauma. Children might “act out” the trauma in their play over and over.
- **Avoidant/Numbness Responses:** The person may avoid triggers or feelings related to the trauma. They may stay away from people or events that remind them of the trauma. They may feel distant from others. They may not feel much at all. The person may have a hard time thinking about the future. Children might have trouble making friends and focusing on school work.
- **Increased Arousal:** The person may have a hard time falling or staying asleep. They may get angry or have trouble focusing. They may be more on their guard and may startle easily. Children might have tantrums or aggressive behavior.

Treatment and Coping

The treatment must fit each person’s needs. Timing is important, because some methods work well right after a trauma, but not well years later. Some ways of treating PTSD are:

- **Psychological first aid** gives support right after the traumatic event.
- **Medications** can help but are often not enough alone.
- **Psychotherapy** that seems to work best for people with PTSD:
 - **Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT)** helps people handle the experience more easily one step at a time and talk about what it means to them.
 - **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)** helps people remember the traumatic events but not be overwhelmed by the memories.
 - **Group therapy** with other survivors of trauma reminds people they are not alone.
- **Service dogs** are becoming more common, especially for veterans.
- **Do not use drugs or alcohol to help deal with feelings about the trauma.** This might help for a short time but will eventually make things worse.

See more at: <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Post-TraumaticStressDisorder>
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