



## Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

### Overview

#### What is post-traumatic stress disorder?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a type of anxiety problem. It can develop after your safety or life has been threatened, or after you experience or see a traumatic event. Some examples of traumatic events are a natural disaster, rape, severe car crash or fighting in a war. Usually, the event makes you feel very afraid or helpless. People with PTSD have trouble coping with and recovering from traumatic events and often feel the effects for months or even years afterwards.

### Symptoms

#### What are the symptoms of PTSD?

You can have symptoms right after the trauma or they can develop months, or even years, later. Your symptoms may include:

- Having flashbacks, nightmares, bad memories or hallucinations
- Trying not to think about the trauma or avoiding people who remind you of it
- Not being able to recall parts of the event
- Not interested in life events
- Feeling emotionally numb or detached from others
- Having trouble sleeping
- Being irritable, angry or jumpy
- Being hypervigilant

People with PTSD are often depressed. Sometimes they try to feel better by using alcohol or drugs. This can lead to substance abuse and addiction.

### Causes & Risk Factors

#### Who develops PTSD?

Whether you'll develop PTSD may depend partly on how severe and intense the trauma was and how long it lasted. Powerful fear-related memories of the event seems to be a major part of PTSD. People who have anxiety, depression or other mental disorders are more likely to develop PTSD. People who have been victims of previous trauma are also at greater risk.

#### Who is at risk for developing PTSD?

The following people may be at risk for PTSD:

- Soldiers, prisoners of war, veterans or victims of war or combat
- Survivors of rape, domestic violence, physical assault such as a mugging or any other random act of violence
- Survivors of unexpected events such as car wrecks, fires or terrorist attacks
- Anyone who has responded to traumatic events such as firefighters, police or rescue workers
- Anyone who has been victimized
- Anyone who has seen a violent act
- Survivors of natural disasters such as hurricanes or earthquakes
- Anyone who has been sexually or physically abused
- Anyone diagnosed with a life-threatening illness or those who have had surgery
- Anyone who has experienced grief such as the unexpected loss of a loved one

## *Diagnosis & Tests*

### **How is PTSD diagnosed?**

Your doctor can diagnose PTSD by talking with you about your symptoms and experiences.

## *Treatment*

### **How is PTSD treated?**

There are many treatments available. Learning about PTSD and talking to a mental health professional who is trained in treating PTSD can help. Support from family and friends is also an important part of treatment. Medicines for depression or anxiety may also be helpful. PTSD can lead to depression and substance abuse. These problems should be treated before or during PTSD treatment.

### **How long does PTSD last?**

PTSD can be treated successfully. However, without treatment, it can last several months to many years, depending on what happened to you and how you feel about it.

### **What can I do to help myself recover?**

- Learn more about PTSD, and work with your doctor or therapist to get better.
- Check your local phone directory or online for support groups in your area.

## *Other Organizations*

- [National Alliance for the Mentally Ill](#)
- [Anxiety Disorders Association of America](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health](#)

## *Questions to Ask Your Doctor*

- Is there a treatment that will help me?
- Should I take medicine?
- Should I see a therapist?
- What kind of therapy will help me?
- What side effects will I experience from my medicine?
- Is there a PTSD support group in this area?
- Should I ask my family members for help?

- What can I do to help myself at home?
- Should I see a psychologist or psychiatrist?
- Will my PTSD ever go away?

## *Bibliography*

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