

# Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

If you have gone through a traumatic experience, it is normal to feel lots of emotions, such as distress, fear, helplessness, guilt, shame or anger. You may start to feel better after days or weeks, but sometimes, these feelings don't go away. If the symptoms last for more than a month, you may have post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD.

*"Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can occur following the experience or witnessing of a traumatic event. A traumatic event is a life-threatening event such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, or physical or sexual assault in adult or childhood."*

## Who can get PTSD?

- Anyone who was a victim, witnessed or has been exposed to a life-threatening situation.
- Survivors of violent acts, such as domestic violence, rape, sexual, abuse or physical attacks.
- Survivors of unexpected events, such as a car accident, natural disaster, or terrorist attack.
- Combat veterans or civilians exposed to war.
- People who have learned of or experienced an unexpected and sudden death of a friend or relative.
- Emergency responders who help victims during traumatic events.
- Children who are neglected and/or abused (physically, sexually or verbally).

## What are the symptoms of PTSD?

For many people, symptoms begin almost right away after the trauma happens. For others, the symptoms may not begin or may not become a problem until years later. Symptoms of PTSD may include:

- Repeatedly thinking about the trauma. You might also have nightmares or flashbacks about the trauma or may become upset when something reminds you of the event.
- Being constantly alert or on guard. You may be easily startled or angered, irritable or anxious and preoccupied with staying safe. You may find it hard to concentrate or sleep
- Avoiding reminders of the trauma. You may not want to talk about the event or be around people or places that remind you of the event.

Other symptoms of PTSD:

- Panic attacks: feeling of intense fear, with shortness of breath, sweating, nausea and racing heart.
- Physical symptoms: chronic pain, headaches, stomach pain, tightness or burning in the chest.
- Feelings of mistrust: losing trust in others and thinking the world is a dangerous place.
- Problems in daily living: having problems functioning in your job, at school, or in social situations.
- Substance abuse: using drugs or alcohol to cope with the emotional pain.
- Relationship problems: problems with intimacy, or feeling detached from your family/friends.
- Depression: persistent sad, anxious or empty mood; loss of interest in once-enjoyed activities; feelings of guilt and shame; or hopelessness about the future.



Phone: (414) 276-3122 or (866) 948-6483

Email: [info@mhawisconsin.org](mailto:info@mhawisconsin.org)

[www.mhawisconsin.org](http://www.mhawisconsin.org)

- Suicidal thoughts

## How can I feel better?

PTSD can be treated with success. Although your memories won't go away, you can learn how to manage your response to these memories and the feelings they bring up. You can also reduce the frequency and intensity of your reactions.

**Psychotherapy.** Although it may seem painful to face the trauma you went through, doing so with the help of a mental health professional can help you get better. There are different types of therapy.

**Medicine,** such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors or SSRIs, is used to treat the symptoms of PTSD such as anxiety, depression and sleep problems.

**Support groups.** Talking to other survivors of trauma can be a helpful step in your recovery.

**Self-care.** Connect with family and friends; find ways to relax; exercise; get enough rest; keep a journal; refrain from using drugs and alcohol.

If someone in your family has PTSD, it can be a hard time for family members too. Your loved one with PTSD may have symptoms that interfere with your relationship and change family life. If your loved one has PTSD, you may also be coping with these difficult feelings. The stress of PTSD can affect all members of the family. If PTSD is affecting your family, consider contacting a mental health professional for individual, couples or family counseling. Through counseling, you can get the help you and your family needs to cope and support each other.

© Copyright Mental Health America 10/9/15