

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: Researchers now know that anyone, even children, can develop PTSD if they have experienced, witnessed, or participated in a traumatic occurrence-especially if the event was life threatening. PTSD can result from terrifying experiences such as rape, kidnapping, natural disasters, or war or serious accidents such as airplane crashes. The psychological damage such incidents cause can interfere with a person's ability to hold a job or to develop intimate relationships with others.

Symptoms: The symptoms of PTSD can range from constantly reliving the event to a general emotional numbing. Persistent anxiety, exaggerated startle reactions, difficulty concentrating, nightmares, and insomnia are common. It is normal to experience some or all of the following symptoms for some time following a trauma: sadness and crying, inability to concentrate, fear and anxiety, sleep problems, distressing dreams, a general sense of uneasiness, outbursts of anger, depression, and irritability. You may be more irritable than usual or your mood may change dramatically from one day to the next. People with PTSD typically avoid situations that remind them of the traumatic event, because they provoke intense distress or even panic attacks.

Formal Diagnosis: Although the symptoms of PTSD may be an appropriate initial response to a traumatic event, they are considered part of a disorder when they persist beyond three months.

Treatment: Psychotherapy can help people who have PTSD regain a sense of control over their lives. They also may need cognitive behavior therapy to change painful and intrusive patterns of behavior and thought and to learn relaxation techniques. Support from family and friends can help speed recovery and healing. Medications, such as antidepressants and anti-anxiety agents to reduce anxiety, can ease the symptoms of depression and sleep problems. Treatment for PTSD often includes both psychotherapy and medication.

Other ways to help alleviate general stress symptoms:

- * Spend extra time with the people you love. Talk about the recent events and about how you are feeling.
- * Take care of yourself, try to get enough sleep, eat well-balanced meals, and try to stick with regular routines. It's important to maintain normal routines and keep a regular pattern of eating and sleeping to ensure that you have the strength to cope with stress.
- * Get as much exercise as possible. Many people find that exercise helps relieve stress.
- * Seek support from your faith community.

* Talk with a counselor or other professional if your fears or emotions are affecting your personal or work life. If you are having nightmares or post traumas or overwhelming feelings of sadness, grief, or fear, seek support from a professional. Traumatic events can trigger memories of past losses or events.

* Avoid using alcohol or illegal drugs to handle your emotions.

* Practice stress-relief techniques that work for you. Take a walk, exercise, listen to music, or read for pleasure.

* Don't be afraid to ask for help. Friends and family will be anxious to help you, or seek help from a professional if you are having trouble coping.

* Avoid watching disturbing programs just before bedtime. If you watch television as a way to unwind, remember that certain programs such as news coverage, or suspense and action programs, can make it hard to fall asleep. Try turning into the news earlier in the evening or during the day.