

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Most people will experience a traumatic event (actual or threat of death) in their lifetime. Most of those people will have a natural recovery and cope without treatment.

If you have flashbacks, nightmares and intense distress when exposed to anything that reminds you of the event for more than 1 month, you may have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Anyone — even children — can get PTSD. PTSD can keep you from living your normal life.

Causes

PTSD can happen after you were:

- raped or sexually, physically or emotionally abused
- a victim of a violent crime
- in a car or airplane crash
- in a weather disaster such as a tornado
- in a fire
- in a war
- in an event where you thought you might be killed.

You can get PTSD if you witness a traumatic event as it is happening to others or if you learn about a traumatic event happening to someone close to you. In these cases, the actual or threat of death may have been from an act of violence (crime, shooting, rape or sexual abuse) or an accident (car, airplane or combat trauma).

Symptoms

If you have PTSD, you may:

- have intrusive thoughts or memories
- avoid people, places or things that remind you of the event
- avoid thoughts or memories that remind you of the event
- have negative thoughts about yourself, others and your future
- feelings of guilt, shame and blame
- trouble concentrating
- trouble sleeping
- stop doing activities with others or activities you once enjoyed
- feel:
 - irritated
 - “on guard” or startled easily
 - “numb”
 - negative
 - cut off from others.

For most people, PTSD starts within about 1 month after being exposed to a traumatic event. Symptoms are common in the first month. Talk with your health care provider if your symptoms last longer.

Many people with PTSD attempt to get rid of their painful emotions by using alcohol or other drugs, which can lead to addictions.

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Treatment

Post-traumatic stress disorder can be treated. The best treatment for PTSD is cognitive behavioral therapy, specifically:

- prolonged exposure for PTSD
- cognitive processing therapy
- eye movement desensitization and reprocessing.

Talk with your health care provider if you have scary memories, depression, trouble sleeping or anger. These problems may be keeping you from doing your normal everyday activities.