

WHAT IS POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)?

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder. It can occur after you have been through a traumatic event. A traumatic event is something awful and scary that you see or that happens to you. During the event, you think that your life or the lives of others are in danger. You may feel afraid or that you have no control over what is happening. Anyone who has gone through a traumatic event can develop PTSD. These events can include:

- Combat or military exposure
- Child sexual or physical abuse
- Terrorist attacks
- Sexual or physical assault
- Serious accidents, such as a car wreck
- Natural disasters, such as a fire, tornado, hurricane, flood, or earthquake



After the event, you may feel scared, confused, and angry. If these feelings don't go away or they get worse, you may have PTSD. These symptoms may disrupt your life, making it hard to continue with your daily activities.

How does PTSD develop?

All people with PTSD have lived through a traumatic event. Strong emotions caused by the event create changes in the brain that may result in PTSD.

Most people who go through a traumatic event have some symptoms at the beginning but don't develop PTSD.

It isn't clear why some people develop PTSD and others don't. How likely you are to get PTSD depends on many things. These include:

- How intense the trauma was
- If you lost a loved one or were hurt
- How close you were to the event
- How strong your reaction was
- How much help and support you got after the event

PTSD symptoms usually start soon after the traumatic event, but they may not happen until months or years later. They also may come and go over many years.



WHAT IS POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)?

What are the symptoms of PTSD?

There are four types of symptoms: re-living symptoms, avoidance symptoms, numbing symptoms, and feeling keyed up.

- Reliving the event (also called re-experiencing symptoms):
Bad memories of the traumatic event can come back at any time. You may feel the same fear and horror you did when the event took place. You may feel like you're going through the event again. Sometimes there is a trigger; a sound or sight that causes you to relive the event.
- Avoiding situations that remind you of the event:
You may try to avoid situations or people that trigger memories of the traumatic event. You may even avoid talking or thinking about the event.
- Feeling numb:
You may find it hard to express your feelings. You may not have positive or loving feelings toward other people and may stay away from relationships. You may not be interested in activities you used to enjoy.
- Feeling keyed up (also called arousal or hyper-arousal symptoms):
You always may be alert and on the lookout for danger. This is known as increased emotional arousal.

PTSD symptoms usually start soon after the traumatic event, but they may not happen until much later. Your symptoms don't have to interfere with your everyday activities, work, and relationships.

What treatments are available?

Today, there are good treatments available for PTSD, including medications.

If you think you are experiencing PTSD, talk with your health care team to get help.

Material adapted from the VA National Center for PTSD website:
<http://www.ncptsd.va.gov>

