

PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that some people develop after seeing or living through a traumatic event that caused or threatened serious harm or death.

A traumatic event is something horrible and scary that you see, hear about, or that happens to you. During a traumatic event you think that your life or others' lives are in danger. You may feel afraid or that you have no control over what is happening. PTSD affects about 7.7 million American adults in a given year, though this disorder can develop at any age, including childhood.

Anyone who has gone through a life-threatening event can develop PTSD. These events can include:

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

Symptoms:

Some people who go through trauma may have symptoms only initially. Others may develop PTSD over time. It isn't clear why some people develop PTSD and others do not. PTSD symptoms fall into three categories:

- » **Intrusion, reliving the event:** Memories of the trauma can reoccur unexpectedly, and episodes called "flashbacks" intrude into their current lives. This happens in sudden, vivid memories that are accompanied by painful emotions, taking over the victim's attention. You may have bad memories or nightmares. You may even feel like you're going through the event again.
- » **Avoiding situations that remind you of the event:** You may try to avoid situations or people that trigger traumatic memories or even avoid talking or thinking about the event. Avoidance symptoms affect relationships. The inability to work out grief and anger means the trauma can continue to affect behavior. Depression is also a common symptom.
- » **Feeling numb:** You may find it hard to express your feelings. Or, you may not be interested in activities you used to enjoy. This is another way to avoid memories
- » **Feeling keyed up (also called hyper arousal):** You may be jittery, always alert or on the lookout for danger. This is known as hyper arousal. PTSD can cause feelings of being constantly threatened by the trauma. This feeling causes exaggerated startled reactions. Many people also attempt to rid themselves of painful re-experiences, loneliness, and panic attacks by abusing alcohol or other drugs to help blunt pain and forget the trauma temporarily. They may show poor impulse control and be a suicide risk.

Treatment of PTSD:

Today, there are good treatments available for PTSD. When you have PTSD dealing with the past can be hard. Instead of telling others how you feel, you may keep your feelings bottled up. But talking

continued on next page

PTSD *continued*

with a therapist can help.

- » **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** CBT is a very effective for counseling PTSD. In CBT, your therapist helps you understand and change how you think about your trauma and its aftermath. You understand how certain thoughts about your trauma can cause you stress and make your symptoms worse.
- » **Brief psychodynamic psychotherapy:** This therapy helps you understand how your past affects the way you feel now. You learn ways of dealing with emotional conflicts. Therapy can help identify what triggers stressful memories and symptoms; develop coping skills; become more aware of your thoughts and feelings to change your reactions, and raise your self- esteem.
- » **Family therapy:** PTSD can impact your whole family. Others may not understand why you get angry, or why you're under so much stress. They may feel scared, guilty, or even angry about your condition. Family therapy is counseling that involves your whole family.
- » **Discussion groups or peer-counseling groups:** This type of therapy encourages survivors of similar traumatic events to share their experiences and reactions. Group members help one another realize that many people would have reacted and felt the same.

Medication: Medication can help control PTSD symptoms, allowing most patients to participate more effectively in psychotherapy when their condition may otherwise prohibit it. Antidepressant medications may be particularly helpful in treating the core symptoms of PTSD – especially intrusive thoughts.