



Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Frightening situations can happen to everyone at some point. The body reacts to bad shocks with hormones released during stressful events. People in shock will have a hard time sleeping and eating, and perhaps an over-active mind runs through the memories of the event. Most people recover from symptoms naturally over time. The body and brain reset, and daily life resumes.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), on the other hand, lasts much longer. It happens when symptoms intensify, rather than subside. The symptoms can arise a few months after the traumatic event.

A person suffering PTSD continues to feel stressed and fearful, long after the danger ends. It can seriously disrupt a person's life.¹ It is possible, however, to shift from Post-Traumatic Stress to Post-Traumatic Healing.

What does it feel like ?

According to the Mayo Clinic², the symptoms of PTSD fall into the following four categories.

Intrusive memories

Symptoms of intrusive memories may include:

- Recurrent, unwanted distressing memories of the traumatic event
- Reliving the traumatic event as if it were happening again (flashbacks)
- Upsetting dreams or nightmares about the traumatic event
- Severe emotional distress or physical reactions to something that reminds you of the traumatic event²

This resource is not intended as a substitute for medical advice. The reader should regularly consult their health care provider in matters relating to their health especially about any symptoms that may need diagnosis or medical attention.



Avoidance

Symptoms of avoidance may include:

- Trying to avoid thinking or talking about the traumatic event
- Avoiding places, activities or people that remind you of the traumatic event

Negative changes in thinking and mood

Symptoms of negative changes in thinking and mood may include:

- Negative thoughts about yourself, other people or the world
- Hopelessness about the future
- Memory problems, including not remembering important aspects of the traumatic event
- Difficulty maintaining close relationships
- Feeling detached from family and friends
- Lack of interest in activities you once enjoyed
- Difficulty experiencing positive emotions
- Feeling emotionally numb

Changes in physical and emotional reactions

Symptoms of changes in physical and emotional reactions (also called arousal symptoms) may include:

- Being easily startled or frightened
- Always being on guard for danger
- Self-destructive behavior, such as drinking too much or driving too fast
- Trouble sleeping
- Trouble concentrating
- Irritability, angry outbursts or aggressive behavior
- Overwhelming guilt or shame²

What it is

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition. It involves exposure to trauma involving death or the threat of death, serious injury, or sexual violence.¹

Traumatic events may include violence, natural disasters, accidents, war or conflict, or other threats to life. Serious illness and medical procedures are also on the list, with reference to stays in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).^{4,5}

PTSD causes intrusive symptoms such as re-living the traumatic event. Many people have vivid nightmares, flashbacks, or thoughts of the event. They may feel like something terrible is about to happen, even when they are safe.

Some people feel very numb and detached. They may feel disconnected from their body or thoughts, or have a hard time feeling emotions.¹

For some people, alcohol or drugs can be a way to cope with PTSD.¹





Stepping forward

Not everyone who experiences trauma develops PTSD. And not everyone who develops PTSD requires psychiatric treatment. For some, the overwhelming symptoms of PTSD ease or disappear over time. Others get better with the help of their support system (family, friends, or clergy).

How do you know when symptoms require treatment? A common recommendation is that if symptoms persist for a month or more, seek help. If symptoms are getting in the way of living your life, ask for help.

For example, some brain tumour patients have PTSD-like reactions to minor medical tests or annual MRIs. Trauma-related fears might cause them to cancel appointments. When it gets in the way of care, the PTSD could be considered disabling.

Mental health professionals use research-proven methods to help people recover from PTSD. Talk therapy (psychotherapy) and medication provide effective evidence-based treatments for PTSD.

Cognitive behavior therapies (CBT) are effective. There are four types of CBT used to treat PTSD.³

Read more [here](#)



Self-care for PTSD

- If you're not enjoying past activities, try something that's new and easy to learn.
- Find a mind-body activity you enjoy such as: meditation, yoga, dance, or grounding techniques.
- Spend time in nature, or looking out the window at nature.
- Keep a diary to track your moods and see if there's a pattern to your moods and disturbances⁶.

Supporting someone with PTSD

Loved ones can also get caught up in psychological pain of PTSD. You might be watching for trouble at all hours of the day.

Do you feel like your loved one is a different person? Do you worry that things will never be normal? Here are some tips to help you cope:

Start by learning more about PTSD. This can give you a better idea of your loved one's experiences. People who have PTSD may withdraw from family and friends. If your loved one doesn't want to talk, remind them that you are there to listen when they're ready.

Symptoms of PTSD such as lack of trust, poor communication or anger flareups — are not about you. They are about the mental health condition.

If anger outbursts are a problem, the caregiver's challenge is to support the person but not the anger. Set your boundaries and don't take the bait. With PTSD, the real trigger for the anger might be buried in the past, and not so much in that moment. Some tips to stay on the wellness path:

- Ask what you can do to help, but don't push unwanted advice.
- Learn what the "triggers" are for your loved one's symptoms.
- Try to put your own feelings into words and encourage your loved one to do the same.
- It's easier to solve problems or resolve conflict when you know what's really going on.

Take care of your own wellness and seek support for yourself. Family counselling or caregiving support groups might be good options.

A loved one's recovery is a chance for everyone to learn the skills that support wellness.¹



Resources

What is PTSD? (Video):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpZk4woj8g0>

PTSD Overview (Website):

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/disorders/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/>

Canadian Psychological Association (Fact Sheet):

https://cpa.ca/docs/File/Publications/FactSheets/FS_PostTraumaticStressDisorder_EN_2020.pdf

Self-help Strategies for PTSD (Brochure):

https://www.anxietycanada.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/adult_hmptsd.pdf

References

1. <https://cmha.ca/brochure/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/>
2. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20355967#:~:text=person%20to%20person.-,Intrusive%20memories,-Symptoms%20of%20intrusive>
3. <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd>
4. <https://www.healthcentral.com/article/what-to-know-about-medical-trauma>
5. <https://twosteps.ca/2018/06/06/ptsd-after-icu/>
6. <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd-and-complex-ptsd/self-care/>

Carefully curated by individuals affected by brain tumours for individuals affected by brain tumours with sound scientific background on topics that are important to us.

We would love to hear your feedback and any suggestions or comments you may have at info@twosteps.ca



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