

PTSD

(Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)



This factsheet provides a description of PTSD, its symptoms and the treatments and support options.

What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is regularly associated with events such as war or natural disasters. However, it is also associated with personal trauma such as violence, rape or abuse.

Other events that may lead to the development of PTSD include mugging, robbery, military combat, being kidnapped or taken hostage, terrorist attack, torture, incarceration as a prisoner of war or in a concentration camp, being diagnosed with a life threatening illness, or a car accident.

At the time of the event, the person's response is emotional: intense fear, helplessness or horror. (In children this may be experienced as disorganised or agitated behaviour).

Symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Symptoms develop after an individual experiences an extreme traumatic event - outside the range of normal human experience. Symptoms of PTSD can include:

- Re-experiencing the event; thoughts and images; flashbacks, nightmares: recurrent dreams of the event; distress at real or symbolic reminders of the event
- Avoidance; keeping busy; avoiding reminders/stimuli connected to the event; repression and inability to recall part of the trauma
- Inability to express affection; feeling detached, cut off and numb
- Intense psychological distress or physiological activity triggered when exposed to similar events, eg anniversaries of event, returning to the area of the event etc
- Sleep disturbance; difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Irritability/aggression
- Inability to concentrate
- Hyper vigilance/extreme alertness panic responses; easily startled.
- Disturbed social, occupational functioning
- May feel guilt for surviving when others did not

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Duration of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

The duration of symptoms/disorder is variable. Some people recover completely within 3 months, whereas for others symptoms may persist for more than 12 months after the trauma. In some cases, symptoms may worsen and get better in cycles. Some people may develop psychosis.

The disorder may be more severe or long lasting when the stressor is caused by another human being, eg torture/rape. Other factors may influence how long the disorder lasts, eg social support, family history, childhood experiences, personality, history of mental illness.

Treatment for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Support groups for those who similar experiences removes the sense of isolation. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) may be helpful for some. Some specialist psychiatric/ counselling units exist, eg those dealing with combat stress. Anti-depressant medication may be helpful in some cases.

Where can I find help and support?

One-to-one support:

- Helpline: 0300 304 7000 (4.30pm – 10.30pm every day)
- Email: http://www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/email/
- Textcare: http://www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/textcare/

Peer support:

- Support Forum: http://www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/supportforum/

Details can be found on our website at www.sane.org.uk

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