

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder



1919 University Avenue West, Suite 400, St. Paul, MN 55104 Tel. 651-645-2948 or 888-NAMIHELPS www.namihelps.org

When something overwhelming and scary happens to a person, it is called a 'traumatic event'. Some examples of a traumatic event are car accidents, experiencing abuse, rape, sexual assault, or living through a natural disaster.

When we are extremely stressed, or in a dangerous situation our body turns on a 'fight or flight' response. Our body focused only on our safety and goes into high alert. While this is happening our brain turns off memories, feelings and thinking. These feelings and memories from the trauma can appear when the person does not expect them to, or even years after the event happened.

Diagnosis

To be diagnosed with PTSD, symptoms must be happening for longer than a month after a traumatic experience. Someone must also be having difficulties in social settings or work to be diagnosed as PTSD. PTSD affects each person differently. Some signs of PTSD are:

1. **Experiencing the trauma again and again**
 - Nightmares or flashbacks of the event
 - Intense distress at reminders of trauma
 - Physical reactions to triggers that symbolize or resemble the event
2. **Avoidant/Numbness Responses**
 - Avoiding things that remind the person of the trauma
 - inability to recall an important memory of the trauma
 - Separation from others, feeling isolated
3. **Increased Arousal**
 - Difficulty falling or staying asleep
 - Outbursts of rage
 - Difficulty concentrating
 - On edge or very easily startled

Treatment

Treatment options should fit each person's needs. Treatment that may be helpful right after experiencing a trauma, may be less helpful years later. Some treatment options are:

- **Psychological first aid:** support and compassion immediately after the traumatic event.
- **Medication**
- **Avoidance of use of substances**
- **Psychotherapy**
- **Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT)** to gradually increase tolerance and reduce anxiety and symptoms
- **Exposure therapy and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR)**
- **Group therapy** with other survivors of trauma is supportive and uplifting.
- **Service dogs**, common with veterans.