

# Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

## WHAT IS PTSD?

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a condition in which a person continues to be adversely affected by a traumatic experience.**

### What Causes PTSD

When a person lives through a very traumatic experience, such a natural disaster, an assault, or a car accident, it is normal for them to feel stressed afterwards, even when no longer in danger. It may take them some time to adjust and recover, both physically and mentally. But with time, their symptoms should decrease in intensity, and they will begin to feel better.

However, in certain cases, the symptoms become worse, rather than better. Though there is no set timetable for the onset of PTSD symptoms, most experts believe they usually start about 3 months after the event. After three months, most people's symptoms have diminished significantly, but some people's symptoms have gotten worse and are now interfering with their lives. It is important to note that in some cases, the symptoms may begin years after the event, long after the person thinks they are over the event. As well, symptoms do come and go. Some people will feel fine for a few months, before another incident reminds them of their own trauma, and they begin to re-experience their symptoms.



**Sadly, only 4 soldiers out of 10 (veterans of the Iraq war) said they would seek help with their PTSD symptoms. Of the 60% who said they would not, the main reason was they were worried people might perceive them as weak.**

### Why Do Some People Get It and Not Others?

Two people work side by side for 10 years at the same company. One day, there is a terrible earthquake that destroys their city, killing thousands, including their co-workers. Somehow, both these people survive. Both suffer and feel traumatized by the events. But as time goes by, one co-worker starts to feel better. They return to work and begin to participate in normal activities, including helping with a fundraiser for the families of the earthquake victims. The other co-worker begins to isolate themselves. They no longer answer phone calls or emails, and when concerned friends enquire about them, they respond with hostility. Even 6 months after the quake, they wake up most mornings screaming.

Some people will recover while others will suffer through PTSD. The reason why it affects some people and not others is not known. However, a person is more susceptible to PTSD if-

- they are female
- they suffer from depression or anxiety
- they have had a past traumatic experience (ie lost a parent when they were a child)
- the trauma was particularly intense or lasted a long time (ie hurricane)
- they lack a good support system (few friends or relatives)
- they have family members with mental health problems
- they were victims of child abuse or neglect

As well, doctors now believe that people's temperament can have an effect. If their parent suffered from PTSD, a person is likely to also suffer from it. As well, the way the brain regulates hormone release during the stressful event also plays a part. It appears some people's brains react differently, increasing the chances for PTSD to develop later on.

## Symptoms

There are three kinds of symptoms- **intrusive memories**, **avoidance** and **hyperarousal**. A person may experience some but not necessarily all these symptoms. Temperament will play a big role in determining which kind of symptom one person will be most afflicted with.

Here are some examples-

- constant flashbacks
- feeling numb
- hopeless about the future
- self-destructive behavior, like excessive drinking
- hearing or seeing things that aren't there
- trouble sleeping & nightmare
- avoiding activities you once enjoyed
- trouble concentrating
- constantly feeling worried or scared
- feeling overwhelming guilt

## What To Do

It is never easy to ask for help but it is crucial to do so. Studies suggest that PTSD can lead to serious health issues, including cardiovascular diseases, chronic pain and depression. Treatment for PTSD has proven to be quite effective and non-intrusive. Though there may be some medications involved to alleviate certain symptoms like increased anxiety or insomnia, most treatment plans rely on talk therapy, notably cognitive behavioral and exposure modalities.

If you have experienced a traumatic event and are having a hard time coping, call your EFAP to access counselling.

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**For confidential assistance**  
**Brown Crawshaw 1.800.668.2055**  
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