

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

What is posttraumatic stress disorder?

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health illness that can happen after you have had or witnessed a trauma, such as a life-threatening event, sexual violence, or serious injury. PTSD affects your mood and body. PTSD can last for months, or it can last for many years.

What are the symptoms of PTSD?

There are four types of symptoms, but PTSD can be different for each person.

Reliving the event. Memories of the trauma can come back at any time. They can feel very real and scary. You may have unwanted memories of the traumatic event, nightmares, or feel like you are going through the event again. You may see, hear, or smell something that causes you to relive the event. This is called a trigger. News reports, seeing an accident, and hearing fireworks are examples of triggers.

Avoiding things that remind you of the event. You may try to stay away from people or places that remind you of the trauma. You may keep busy or not ask for help so you do not have to talk or think about the event. You may avoid crowds because they

feel scary or avoid driving if you were in a car accident.

Having more negative thoughts and feelings than before the event. You may have bad feelings about yourself and other people and feel like you do not care about things or people like you used to. You may forget about the trauma or have trouble talking about it. You may think the world is scary and no one can be trusted. You may feel guilt or shame about the event.

Feeling on edge or keyed up. You may be shaky or jumpy or always looking around you. You may suddenly become angry or upset, have a hard time sleeping, or find it hard to think. Loud noises may scare or surprise you. You may do things that are not good for you, like smoking, using drugs or alcohol, or driving in an unsafe way.

How do I know if I have PTSD?

Your doctor can diagnose PTSD. Talk to them if you have symptoms or experienced a trauma.

How is PTSD treated?

Therapy is important in treating PTSD. The kind of therapy that is best is called

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trauma-focused therapy. Another option is medicine. Some medicines that are used to treat anxiety and depression are also used to treat PTSD. Your doctor may refer you to a trauma-focused therapist or give you medicines to help with symptoms.

Where can I find more information?

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/ptsd.html>

National Institute of Mental Health
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd>

PTSD Foundation of America
<https://ptsdusa.org/>

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
<https://www.ptsd.va.gov/index.asp>

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