

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

WHAT IS POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER?

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to a terrifying or scary event or experience. While it is normal for anxiety to occur right after a frightening event, PTSD develops later-sometimes weeks or months after the event.

WHAT CAUSES POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER?

The cause of PTSD is not known, but psychological, genetic, physical and social factors may contribute to it. It can develop at any age, including childhood. Personal traumatic experiences that can lead to PTSD include:

- Military combat
- Torture
- Violent personal assault (sexual assault, rape, physical attack, robbery, mugging)
- Being kidnapped
- Being taken hostage
- Experiencing natural or manmade disasters
- Severe automobile crashes
- Being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness
- Witnessing a serious injury or unnatural death of another person due to violent assault
- Unexpectedly witnessing a dead body or body parts
- Being told about a traumatic event (violent assault, serious accident, serious injury, unexpected death of a close friend or family member)
- Having suffered abuse as a child



WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER?

PTSD can be extremely disabling. Many people with PTSD repeatedly re-experience the frightening ordeal in the form of:

- Flashback episodes
- Memories
- Nightmares
- Frightening thoughts, especially when exposed to events or objects that remind them of the trauma
- Being easily startled
- Inability to sleep
- Being easily irritated and having angry outbursts
- Feelings of loneliness



The person with PTSD may also experience:

- Depression
- Feeling of guilt
- Substance abuse
- Overall poor memory
- Problem keeping a job
- Difficulty relating to family and friends
- Overall poor social functioning
- Multiple physical complaints

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS?

Not everyone who lives through a terrifying event will develop PTSD. Studies have shown that the following people are most likely to develop PTSD:

- Women are more likely than men
- Individuals with a history of depression and anxiety conditions

- Persons with a history of childhood abuse
- Persons with a family history of psychiatric illness

The severity, duration, and closeness of your exposure to the trauma are the most important factors affecting your likelihood of developing PTSD.

HOW IS POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER DIAGNOSED?

If your Health Care Provider finds no medical cause for your symptoms, he or she will ask you a series of questions to determine if you have PTSD. If the Provider suspects PTSD, he or she will refer you to a Mental Health Care Provider for further evaluation and treatment.

HOW IS POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER TREATED?

PTSD can be treated. Your Mental Health Care Provider will give you medication to help you feel less afraid and tense. But it may take a few weeks for the medicine to work.

Talking to a specially trained doctor or counselor helps many people with PTSD. This is called "Talk Therapy." Talk Therapy can help you work through your terrible experience.



HOW CAN I PREVENT POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER?

Counseling soon after experiencing a terrifying event may help reduce your chances of developing PTSD. The earlier counseling begins after the event, the better your chances of lessening or eliminating symptoms of PTSD.

You can also lessen the symptoms of PTSD by maintaining a healthy lifestyle that includes:

- Eating healthy foods. Avoid foods high in fat and sugar. Eat at regular times. Don't skip meals.
- Limiting caffeine. It causes anxiety and increases the stress response.
- If you drink alcohol, have no more than 1 drink a day.
- Drinking 8 to 10 glasses of water a day.
- Getting enough sleep and rest.
- Getting regular exercise.
- Balancing work and play. Plan some time for hobbies and recreation.

REFERENCES / LINKS:

American Institute for Preventive Medicine

http://aipm.wellnesscheckpoint.com/library/banner_main.asp?P=4B8A84AS144&SNSmode=D&SNS=788

National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/anxiety/ptsd.pdf>

Thomson Micromedex

http://www.praxis.md/index.asp?page=bhg_brief&article_id=BHG01PS11

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR MENTAL HEALTH CARE PROVIDER



- What can I do to control the scary memories, depression, trouble sleeping and/or anger I feel?
- What's the name of my medication and how will it help me?
- What dosage(s) of medication do I need to take?
- At what times of the day should I take them? Do I need to take them with food?
- Do I need to avoid any specific foods, medications, supplements (vitamins, herbs) or activities while I am taking this medication?
- What should I do if I forget to take my medication?
- What side effects might I have? What can I do about them?
- How can I reach you in an emergency?
- How long will it take for me to feel better? What type of improvement should I expect?
- Are there any special risks I should worry about? How can I prevent them? How can I recognize them?
- If my medication needs to be stopped for any reason, how should I do it? (Never stop taking your medication without talking to your Mental Health Care Provider.)
- Should I have "talk" therapy? What type do you recommend? Is it possible that I could be treated with talk therapy and no medication?
- Is there anything I can do to help my treatment work better, such as changing my diet, physical activity, sleep pattern, or lifestyle?
- If my current treatment isn't helpful, what are my alternatives? What is my next step?
- What risks do I need to consider if I want to become pregnant?

- How can I spot my warning signs?
- How can I explain my condition to my family?

There are two key people on your health care team, you and your health care provider. You are just as important as your provider in directing your health care. The first step you should take in becoming an active team member of your health care team is to understand what you are being treated for and why. Continue to ask questions until you understand the answer. By paying attention to your health and maintaining your own records, you will become an active, informed decision maker in your health care.



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