

## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric illness that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event. A traumatic event is one in which an individual experiences a threat (actual or perceived) of death or serious injury to themselves or others.

Traumatic events can be experiences within the family, community, or include surviving a natural disaster. One out of five individuals who experience a traumatic event will go on to develop PTSD.

Many people experience traumatic events and don't go on to develop symptoms of PTSD, but some do. There are many reasons for this, including both risk factors that make people more likely to develop PTSD, and resiliency factors that make them less likely to develop the disorder. See below for examples of each.

### Signs of PTSD include:

- Re-experiencing the trauma
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hyper-vigilance
- Feeling detached from others
- Outbursts of anger
- Emotional numbness
- Avoiding places that remind the person of the event

## Risk and resiliency factors for PTSD

### Risk factors include:

- Feeling helpless or extreme fear
- Have little or no support following the traumatic event
- Being physically hurt
- Seeing someone else hurt
- Seeing a dead body
- Childhood trauma
- Dealing with further negative consequences of the trauma such as pain or grieving a loss
- Having a history of other behavioral health disorders

### Resiliency factors include:

- Receiving support from friends or family after the traumatic event
- Working with a support group after the event
- Learning to feel good about your own actions in the face of a traumatic event
- Finding positive coping strategies
- Finding a way of learning from the traumatic event
- Being able to act in the face of fear or danger

## Treatment Can Help

How is PTSD treated? First, talk to your clinician/doctor about your symptoms. PTSD is a type of anxiety disorder and includes a range of symptoms; not everyone experiences all or the same symptoms. It is important that your doctor conducts a complete evaluation and connects you with a mental health specialist if needed. Therapy and medication together can be effective in treating PTSD.

### Psychotherapy

Because PTSD is a type of anxiety, cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) is considered an effective treatment. CBT teaches different ways of thinking, behaving, and reacting to situations. Improved coping skills are one major outcome of CBT. Interpersonal therapy can also be useful in helping individual manage the impact of their moods on social interactions, decrease relationship strain and encourage consistency in treatment.

### Medication

Medication can be a component of treatment for PTSD. Any decision regarding the use of medication should be made with your doctor. Talk with your doctor about the best treatment for you.

## Resources

**Anxiety and Depression Association of America:** [adaa.org](http://adaa.org)

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**, available 24 hours everyday: 1-800-273-8255

**National Alliance on Mental Illness:** [www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Anxiety-Disorders](http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Anxiety-Disorders)