

Condition:



Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

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What is PTSD?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder which may develop following exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence, causing feelings of intense fear, helplessness or horror. The event may be witnessed or even read about rather than directly experienced.

It is natural to feel afraid during and after a traumatic situation. Fear triggers many split-second changes in the body to help defend against danger or to avoid it. This “fight-or-flight” response is a typical reaction meant to protect a person from harm. Nearly everyone will experience a range of reactions after trauma, yet most people recover from initial symptoms naturally. Those who continue to experience problems may be diagnosed with PTSD.

If you have PTSD you may feel stressed or frightened even when you are not in danger, you may have intrusive memories of the event. The memories can affect your physical and mental health, relationships, work and daily activities.

PTSD and work

For some people the barriers to work with PTSD could be concerns over colleagues' reactions or a lack of support.

You may be worrying over factors such as:

- Stigma associated with mental health conditions
- Perceived or actual lack of planning or support from employer
- Fear that colleagues may find out about your PTSD and have negative reactions
- You may be uncertain about the type of assistance managers or supervisors will provide
- You may be worrying about discrimination and the impact on future career prospects
- Concerns that causes of work related stress have not been addressed
- And there may be a lack of self-confidence

Work however can play an important role in recovery if you are experiencing PTSD, this includes:

- Improving quality of life and wellbeing
- Providing structure and a daily routine
- Contributing to a sense of meaning and purpose
- Promoting opportunities for social inclusion and support
- Providing financial security
- Providing a sense of achievement and pride in work

How do I know if I have PTSD?

The symptoms of PTSD can start immediately or after a delay of weeks or months, but usually within 6 months of the traumatic event.

Flashbacks & nightmares

You find yourself re-living the event, again and again. This can happen both as a 'flashback' in the day and as nightmares when you are asleep. These can be so realistic that it feels as though you are living through the experience all over again.

Avoidance & numbing

It can be just too upsetting to re-live your experience over and over again. So you distract yourself. You keep your mind busy by losing yourself in a hobby, working very hard. You avoid places and people that remind you of the trauma. You may deal with the pain of your feelings by trying to feel nothing at all – by becoming emotionally numb.

Being 'on guard'

You find that you stay alert all the time, as if you are looking out for danger. You can't relax. This is called 'hypervigilance'. You feel anxious and find it hard to sleep. Other people will notice that you are jumpy and irritable.

Physical Symptoms

Muscle aches and pains
Diarrhoea
Irregular heartbeats

Causes of PTSD

PTSD can start after any traumatic event. A traumatic event is one where you see that you are in danger, your life is threatened, or where you see other people dying or being injured. Typical traumatic events would be:

- Serious accidents or major car crash
- Military combat
- Severe physical assault or injury
- Rape or Sexual Assault
- Terrorist attack
- Natural disasters
- Domestic violence
- Traumatic birth experience
- Witnessing murder or violent deaths

Talking to your GP/Health professional

Before having treatment for PTSD, a detailed assessment of your symptoms will be carried out to ensure treatment is tailored to your individual needs.

Your GP will often carry out an initial assessment, but you'll be referred to a mental health specialist for further assessment and treatment if you've had symptoms of PTSD for more than four weeks or your symptoms are severe.

There are a number of mental health specialists you may see if you have PTSD, such as a psychologist, a community psychiatric nurse or a psychiatrist.

Treatments

<h3>Watchful waiting</h3>	<h3>Medication for PTSD</h3>
<p>Monitoring your symptoms to see whether they improve or get worse without treatment.</p>	<p>People experiencing PTSD aren't routinely prescribed medication. However, you might be offered medication if you also have depression or sleep problems caused by the PTSD</p>
<h3>Psychotherapy Trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy (TF-CBT)</h3>	<h3>Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR)</h3>
<p>This is a form of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) specifically adapted for PTSD. NICE recommends that you are offered 8–12 regular sessions of around 60–90 minutes, seeing the same therapist at least once a week.</p>	<p>This is a fairly new treatment that can reduce PTSD symptoms such as being easily startled. It involves making rhythmic eye movements while recalling the traumatic event. The rapid eye movements are intended to create a similar effect to the way your brain processes memories and experiences while you're sleeping.</p>
<h3>Other treatment options</h3>	
<p>Some people with PTSD say they have found other treatments helpful in managing their condition, such as group therapy and art therapies.</p>	

Self-Management

There are some things you can do alongside medical treatment that can boost your mood and help to manage the symptoms of PTSD. They can also help to distract you and look after your general health.



Take notice

Try to be more mindful of your surroundings and use mindfulness and relaxation techniques to support yourself when stressed. Breathing techniques - When you are feeling stressed breathing techniques are something that can help with regulating your breathing and help you to relax when you are rushing to get everything done.



[Click here](#) for more information



Be active

Exercise is evidenced to improve our moods so get out and about even if it is just stepping out for a short walk to the local shop. This can also help with the anxiety associated with PTSD.



Keep learning

Learning something new works as both a distraction and a motivator - try to take opportunities that you have around you to learn something new and develop on skills that you already have.



Connect

As mentioned above don't go it alone - talk and connect with other people even when you feel low. Lots of people who experience PTSD find it hard to open up to others. You don't need to be able to describe the trauma to tell someone how you are currently feeling.

It could help to talk to a friend or family member, or a professional such as a GP or a trained listener at a helpline.

Other self-care tools include:

Get to know your triggers

You might find that certain experiences, situations or people seem to trigger flashbacks or other symptoms. These might include specific reminders of past trauma, such as smells, sounds, words, places or particular types of books or films. Some people find things especially difficult on significant dates, such as the anniversary of a traumatic experience.

Give yourself time

Everyone has their own unique response to trauma and it's important to take things at your own pace. For example, it may not be helpful to talk about your experiences before you feel ready. Try to be patient with yourself and don't judge yourself harshly for needing time and support to recover from PTSD.

Try peer support

Peer support brings together people who have had similar experiences, which some people find very helpful.

Hope

There is always hope. With the right treatment and support, things will get better.

Find specialist support

You might find it useful to contact an organisation that specialises in advice and support for PTSD, such as ASSIST Trauma Care.

Look after your physical health

Coping with PTSD can be exhausting. You might feel like you can't find the energy to take care of yourself, but looking after your physical health can make a difference to how you feel emotionally. For example, it can help to:

- **Think about your diet.** Eating regularly and keeping your blood sugar stable can help you cope when things feel difficult.
- **Spend time outside.** The outside world might feel overwhelming, but spending time in green space can boost your wellbeing
- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** While you might want to use drugs or alcohol to cope with difficult feelings, memories or physical pain, they can make you feel worse in the long run.

Useful links

Reference



Click here to visit NHS
Website (link opens in new window)

Reference



Click here to visit Assist Trauma Care
Website (link opens in new window)

Reference



Click here to visit Nopanic
Website (link opens in new window)

Reference



Click here to visit the Samaritans
Website (link opens in new window)

Reference



Click here to visit Sane
Website (link opens in new window)

Reference



Click here to visit Mind
Website (link opens in new window)

Helplines

SAMARITANS

Samaritans are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to listen to anything that is upsetting you, including intrusive thoughts and difficult thoughts of suicide and self-harm.

Call **116 123**, or email jo@samaritans.org



SANEline offers emotional support and information from 6pm–11pm, 365 days a year. Their national number is **0300 304 7000**

The Silver Line

If you're an older person (over the age of 55), the Silver Line is there 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to provide information, support and friendship. You can call them from anywhere in the UK on

0800 4 70 80 90 (freephone)



If you're a man experiencing distressing thoughts and feelings, the Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) is there to support you. They're open from 5pm–midnight, 365 days a year.

Their national number is **0800 58 58 58**, and they also have a web chat service if you're not comfortable talking on the phone.

nightline

If you are a student, you can look at the Nightline website to see if your university or college offers a night-time listening service. Nightline phone operators are all students too.

