

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

*Have you had a traumatic experience, and it still haunts you?
Do you have nightmares or problems sleeping, flashbacks, feelings of irritation and depression?
Do you have a hard time relaxing, and always feel keyed up, or startle easily?
You may want to know more about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and how to handle it.*

In general, people with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) have:

- experienced a traumatic and/or life threatening event or circumstance
- experienced helplessness and terror during this experience
- suffer from nightmares and poor sleep, or flashbacks related to this experience
- have avoidance and hypervigilance around similar situations
- struggle with their mood and focus
- suffer from these symptoms interfering with their day-to-day functioning

People with PTSD tend to feel overwhelmed or out of control in the aftermath of the traumatic experience—although sometimes this effect may be delayed. And there are some risks:

- People with PTSD can have problems with anger and irritability
- They can be depressed because of the effect on their current their lives due to the PTSD symptoms.
- They can abuse alcohol and drugs in an effort to self-medicate to control mood or sleep.

Many people with PTSD symptoms feel that there is something badly wrong with them, but have not sought support or treatment because they feel weak, or wrong, or ashamed. They feel others have it worse, or others had the same experience and are not feeling this way, so they don't deserve help...or they feel hopeless or frightened about what it would take to feel better. *But the truth is that the symptoms they are feeling develop as a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.*

The statistics on PTSD are shocking:

- About 8% of the population will develop PTSD in their lifetimes, about 5% at any given time.
- About 20% of people who experience a traumatic event will develop PTSD, and 70% of all people will experience a traumatic event (and about 15% experience more than three traumatic events).
- The estimated risk of developing PTSD for people who experience certain traumatic events is:
- Rape: 49% severe physical assault: 32% serious accident/injury: 17%
- Shooting/stabbing: 15% sudden death of close person: 14% witness to violent death: 7%
- Women are about twice as likely to develop PTSD as men, probably due to the higher incidence of interpersonal violence women experience.
- First responders and helping professionals, who are exposed to more intense and more frequent traumas, are at higher risk of PTSD and of substance and depression problems.

The good news is this condition can be improved with self care and treatment. You can learn to return to a sense of safety in your life, to feel you have more control over your life and behavior, and to heal and develop more sense of connection, satisfaction and mastery in your life:

- Learn to take care of yourself physically: get adequate nutrition, sleep, and exercise.
- Learn to take care of yourself emotionally: pay attention to your feelings, honor and work through them.
- Learn to take care of yourself socially: get support, don't isolate, seek peers, family and connection.
- Learn to take care of yourself spiritually: pay attention to your need for meaning and value in life.
- Learn more about the potential positive use of medication if your symptoms are profound.