

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is a psychiatric disorder that occurs in those who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, such as, a natural disaster, serious accident, terrorist act, war/combat, rape, threatened with death, sexual violence, or serious injury. It affects approximately 3.5% of U.S. adults every year and an estimated 1 in 11 people will be diagnosed with PTSD in their lifetime. Women are twice more likely than men to have PTSD while Latinos, African Americans, and Native Americans have even higher rates than non-Latino whites.



SYMPTOMS

- Having intrusive thoughts, such as, repeated involuntary memories, distressing dreams, or flashbacks of the traumatic event.
- Avoiding reminders, such as, people, places, activities, objects, and situations that may trigger distressing memories of the traumatic event.
- Having angry outbursts, behaving recklessly, paranoia, being easily startled, or having problems concentrating or sleeping.
- Having negative thoughts and feelings about oneself or others, having less interest in previously enjoyed activities, feeling detached or estranged from others, being unable to experience positive emotions, or having distorted thoughts about the cause or consequences of the event, ongoing fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame.
- Symptoms in children and teens may include: new cases of wetting, being unable to talk, acting out the event during playtime, and separation anxiety with a parent or other trusted adult.

DIAGNOSIS

A psychiatrist or psychologist can diagnose PTSD. A diagnosis requires indirect or first-hand exposure to a traumatic event. Symptoms must be present for more than a month and cause significant distress or problems with daily functions.

An adult must have all of the following for at least one month, for a diagnosis:

- At least one re-experiencing symptom
- At least one avoidance symptom
- At least two arousal and reactivity symptoms
- At least two cognition and mood symptoms

Many develop symptoms within three months after the trauma, but they may appear later and persist for months or sometimes years afterwards.

PSTD often occurs along with related conditions, such as depression, substance use, memory problems, and other physical and mental health problems.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

■ MEDICATIONS

Antidepressants may help control symptoms like sadness, worry, anger, and feeling numb. Other medications may be helpful in treating specific symptoms such as sleep deprivation and nightmares.

■ PSYCHOTHERAPY

Talking with a mental health professional may be helpful and can occur one-on-one or in a group session. Some therapists target the symptoms of PTSD directly while others may focus on social, family, or job-related problems. Key components of therapy includes education about symptoms, teaching skills to identify triggers of symptoms, and skills to manage the symptoms.

■ COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR THERAPY

Includes exposure therapy – a safe gradual exposure to trauma – and cognitive restructuring to help make sense of the bad memories and frame them in a realistic way.

Sources: *What is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?* <https://bit.ly/3ySZ7O2>; *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.* <https://bit.ly/3yODG0z>