



Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a prolonged and sometimes delayed anxiety disorder resulting from a traumatic event. A large number of cases are war-related. People suffering from PTSD can benefit from counselling, support and medicines.

Who gets PTSD?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a serious psychological reaction that some people develop after an overwhelmingly frightening or traumatic experience, especially an experience that threatens life or safety (e.g., war, assault, sexual assault, natural disaster, serious accident, torture or abuse).

Most people who experience a traumatic event will have emotional and psychological reactions (e.g., fear, sadness, guilt, anger) that lessen with time. Some people develop the longer lasting condition of PTSD.

Signs and symptoms

PTSD symptoms may occur immediately after the traumatic event or may appear months or years later. Symptoms vary from person to person and can include:

- Intrusive memories or flashbacks of the event
- Numbed feelings, detachment and withdrawal
- Behaviours to avoid thoughts, feelings or conversations connected to the trauma
- Behaviours to avoid activities, people or places which recall the trauma
- Depression and anxiety disorders
- Difficulty sleeping – often due to distressing dreams
- Over-sensitivity to noise, smells, sudden movements – known as hyper-arousal
- Rage, anger, irritability
- Concentration and memory problems
- Feelings of guilt or shame
- Abuse of alcohol and other substances.

Treatment

Treatment can help people with PTSD get relief from symptoms, improve their family life and social relationships and obtain stable employment.

Management of PTSD often involves a number of different strategies including:

- Education about the condition
- Counselling, which may involve learning to recall what happened without distress
- Support groups with others suffering from PTSD
- Treatment programs – (e.g., anger management)
- Some medicines
- Reducing reliance on alcohol or inappropriate medicines, if this is a problem
- Support for family members.

Medicines

Prescription medicines that can help PTSD include:

- Sedatives and anti-anxiety medicines – may reduce anxiety symptoms
- Antidepressants – may help depression and flashbacks
- Antidepressants and anti-epileptic medicines – may reduce the hyper-arousal response and feelings of impulsiveness or rage.

Consult your doctor or pharmacist before:

- Stopping regular PTSD medicines – stopping suddenly may make symptoms worse
- Taking any medicines (including complementary medicines) in addition to prescribed PTSD medicines – as they may interfere with each other.

What about alcohol?

Some people drink alcohol heavily when under stress.

Alcohol will not help PTSD and may make it worse. It is important to know that alcohol:

- Will increase sedation from anti-anxiety medicines
- Will impair driving and the ability to work
- May have a depressive effect
- May increase side effects of PTSD medicines.

Self care

- Acknowledge PTSD symptoms and seek help.
- Remember that asking for help is not a sign of weakness.
- Accept support from family and friends – studies show this helps recovery.
- Make time for relaxation. Learn some relaxation techniques.
- Exercise regularly to improve general health and well-being. Regular aerobic exercise can help reduce the physical effects of stress and trauma.
- Have a healthy, well-balanced diet.
- Get adequate sleep and rest.
- Cut down on cigarettes, alcohol, caffeine – these may make stress worse.
- Some people find it helpful to write about their experiences and feelings.
- Be aware of anniversaries or events that may increase distress.
- Join a support group.

If you are an emergency services worker, post-incident counselling is available for YOU as well as for the trauma victims.

Important

If you (or someone you know) have been exposed to a traumatic event (even if it was many years ago), check the list of symptoms – You may benefit from consulting a doctor about PTSD.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

Care for family members

PTSD also impacts on family members of people with PTSD. They may need to cope with difficult behaviour and job instability. Families can get assistance from support organisations.

Related fact cards

- *Anxiety*
- *Depression*
- *Medicines & Driving (website only – ask your pharmacist)*
- *Relaxation Techniques*
- *Sleeping Problems*
- *Staying a Non-Smoker*
- *Wise Use of Medicines*

For more information

A doctor – listed under ‘Medical Practitioners’ in the yellow pages of the phone book.

Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health (ACPMH) – phone (03) 9496 2922 or website www.ncptsd.unimelb.edu.au

Lifeline – phone 131 114 (available 24 hours from anywhere in Australia) or website www.lifeline.org.au

Victims of Crime – contact your local police station

Vietnam Veterans’ Counselling Service (VVCS) – phone 1800 011 046 (freecall from anywhere in Australia)

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacy Self Care Support – phone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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