

## recovering from PTSD: when to seek treatment

PTSD stands for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, which is the term for a mental health condition which some people develop after experiencing a terrifying event. You may have experienced a traumatic event directly, or you may have witnessed such an occurrence. Some of the most common types of events which may lead to PTSD include sexual assault, physical assault, childhood abuse, combat, car accidents and natural disasters (e.g., tornado, fire).

Most people who go through traumatic events have temporary difficulty adjusting and coping, but with

time and support, they usually experience a natural recovery process. However, in the case of PTSD, the natural recovery process does not occur, and you may develop difficulties which can last for months or years and interfere with your day-to-day functioning. If you suspect you may have PTSD, it is important to seek out assessment. If you are found to be suffering from PTSD, you may be interested in pursuing treatment for this concern. There are many highly effective treatments for PTSD.

### symptoms of PTSD

If you are suffering from PTSD, you may notice intense and upsetting thoughts and feelings related to your experience which have lasted long after the traumatic event has ended. You may relive the event through flashbacks or nightmares. You may feel sadness, fear or anger, and you may feel detached or estranged from other people. You may find yourself avoiding situations

or people which remind you of the trauma, and you may have strong negative reactions to ordinary situations, such as when hearing a loud noise or being accidentally touched. Symptoms can vary over time and they can also vary from person to person. Symptoms may also range in severity. PTSD symptoms are generally grouped into four clusters:

<b>Intrusive Memories</b>	<b>Avoidance</b>	<b>Negative Changes in Thinking &amp; Mood</b>	<b>Physical &amp; Emotional Changes</b>
Unwanted and distressing memories	Not wanting to think or talk about event	Negative thoughts about self, others, the world	Easily startled or scared
Flashbacks (feeling of reliving event)	Avoiding reminders (people, places & activities associated with trauma)	Hopelessness about future	Always "on guard" for danger
Nightmares		Memory problems	Self-destructive behaviours, such as substance abuse or risk-taking
Severe distress when reminded of trauma		Difficulties maintaining relationships	Trouble with sleep
		Detachment from friends, family	Poor concentration

## symptoms of PTSD

Intrusive Memories	Avoidance	Negative Changes in Thinking & Mood	Physical & Emotional Changes
		Lack of interest in enjoyable activities	Irritability, anger or aggressiveness
		Difficulties experiencing positive emotions & emotional numbness	Overwhelming guilt and/or shame

## treatment of PTSD

PTSD is treatable, and for those who complete treatment, the majority will no longer suffer from PTSD. There are a number of different treatment options. In general, treatment for PTSD will help you process your traumatic memories in a safe setting. By dealing with trauma memories in a calm and predictable way, you will begin to have less of a reaction to the thoughts, emotions and dreams related to the trauma. Although it is not possible to remove the traumatic experience from your memory, you and your therapist can work with your memories to diminish their intensity. As you make progress in treatment, you will find that you have less frequent nightmares, flashbacks and intrusive thoughts about the event. You may no longer have to avoid people, places and situations which remind you of the trauma, and you may also find you are able to have a greater range of positive feelings again. Medications such as antidepressants, and medications which relieve nightmares can also help ease your symptoms.

Treatment of PTSD can sometimes be complex, particularly if you experienced a very large number of traumatic events, if you were a very young age at the time of the trauma, and/or if you have developed secondary concerns, such as clinical depression, addictions, eating disorders or significant problems in your relationships. These factors may lengthen treatment time. Treatment time also can vary from person to person.

When PTSD treatment is successful, you will have control of your memories, rather than the memories controlling you. After completing treatment, most people have far fewer symptoms related to their trauma, and many individuals who participate in treatment achieve full recovery from PTSD.

## references

- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.)*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Mayo Clinic Staff. (2018). *Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)*. ([www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)).
- Parekh, Ranna. (2017). *What is posttraumatic stress disorder?* American Psychiatric Association ([www.psychiatry.org](http://www.psychiatry.org)).

\* Created by U of A Counselling and Clinical Services. For additional resources, visit: [uofa.ualberta.ca/current-students/wellness/mentalhealth](http://uofa.ualberta.ca/current-students/wellness/mentalhealth)

