



# Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

The National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI) defines PTSD as a disorder that can occur following a traumatic event. PTSD causes a person to become caught in a pattern that may increase anxiety, sleeplessness, anger or fear<sup>1</sup>.

When a person experiences a traumatic or dangerous event, a series of chemical reactions are triggered within the body. These reactions are designed to help handle a threat and prepare to fight or run away from the threat. Physical changes include; increased heart rate, change in blood pressure, and an increase in overall adrenaline.

It may take a few days or weeks to overcome a traumatic experience and during those days of recovery one may experience signs and symptoms similar to PTSD. This is a normal reaction of the body and mind processing and healing from the experience. When someone becomes caught in a constant pattern of re-experiencing their trauma for months and years, they are experiencing PTSD.

## Events that can lead to PTSD:

- Natural disasters such as tornados, hurricanes and earthquakes
- Car accident or a plane crash
- Terrorist attack
- Sudden death of a loved one or friend
- Rape or sexual assault
- Kidnapping
- Acts of violence such as a robbery or murder.
- Physical abuse
- Childhood neglect or abuse
- War

## Symptoms of PTSD

**Re-experiencing:** This is when a person continues to have the same mental, emotional, and physical experiences that occurred during or just after the trauma. This includes thinking about the trauma, seeing images of the event, feeling agitated, and having physical sensations like those that occurred during the trauma. Trauma survivors find themselves feeling and acting as if the trauma is happening again: feeling as if they are in danger, experiencing panic sensations, wanting to escape, getting angry, and thinking about attacking or harming someone else. Because they are anxious and physically agitated, they may have trouble sleeping and trouble concentrating.

## Mentally re-experiencing the trauma can include:

- Upsetting memories such as images or other thoughts about the trauma
- Feeling as if the trauma is happening again (“Flashbacks”)
- Bad dreams and nightmares
- Getting upset when reminded about the trauma

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<sup>1</sup> NAMI - [http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=posttraumatic\\_stress\\_disorder](http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=posttraumatic_stress_disorder)

- Anxiety or fear—feeling in danger again
- Anger or aggressive feelings – feeling the need to defend oneself
- Trouble controlling emotions because reminders lead to sudden anxiety or anger
- Trouble concentrating or thinking clearly

Although re-experiencing symptoms are unpleasant, they are a sign that the body and mind are actively trying to cope with the traumatic experience.

**Avoidance:** People who have been through traumas usually seek to avoid reminders. Ways of avoiding thoughts, feelings, and sensations associated with the trauma can include:

- Avoiding conversations and staying away from places, activities, or people that might be a reminder of the trauma
- “Shutting down” emotionally or feeling emotionally numb to things
- Trouble having loving feelings or feeling any strong emotions
- Feeling disconnected from the world and feeling alone
- Avoiding situations that might cause an emotional reaction
- Loss of interest in activities that use to bring enjoyment

Avoiding thinking about trauma or avoiding treatment for trauma-related problems may keep a person from feeling upset in the short run. But avoiding treatment of continuing trauma symptoms prevents progress coping with trauma so that people’s trauma symptoms don’t go away.

### Secondary Symptoms of PTSD:

Secondary symptoms are problems that come about because of having post-traumatic re-experiencing and avoidance symptoms. Associated symptoms are problems that don’t come directly from being overwhelmed with fear, but happen because of other things that were going on at the time of the trauma.

All of these problems can be secondary or associated trauma symptoms:

- **Aggressive behavior toward oneself or others:** This can happen due to frustration over the inability to control PTSD symptoms. Some people are aggressive because they grew up with people who lashed out when they were angry and never taught them how to cope with angry feelings. Because angry feelings tend to keep people away, they can create a barrier and make it difficult to create positive connections and get help. Anger and aggression can cause problems at work and in relationships.
- **Self-blame, guilt, and shame:** PTSD symptoms make it hard to fulfill current responsibilities. People suffering from PTSD begin to question what they did or didn’t do at the time of a trauma. Often, when people try to make sense of their experience, they blame themselves. Self-blame causes distress and can prevent a person from reaching out for help.
- **Detached or disconnected from others:** This can happen when a person has difficulty feeling or expressing positive feelings. After traumas, people can get wrapped up in their problems or even become numb. They may stop putting energy into their relationships with friends and family and avoid any interaction with others.
- **Physical symptoms:** This can happen because of long periods of physical agitation or arousal from anxiety. Trauma survivors may avoid medical treatment because it reminds them of their trauma. Physical symptoms may include; high blood pressure, increased heart rate and constant headaches.

- **Alcohol and/or drug abuse:** This is a common way to cope with a disturbing trauma. Some may seek relief from abusing drugs or alcohol and may find it a way to sooth and treat their PTSD symptoms.

### **PTSD and co-occurring conditions**

People who suffer from PTSD often have additional conditions that co-occur with PTSD. This may include:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Sleep disorders
- Substance Abuse

### **Next steps**

If you or a loved one has PTSD it is important to get help right away. The earlier PTSD is treated, the easier it is to overcome. It is natural to want to avoid any painful memories or feelings from a traumatic event, but this will only cause the PTSD to get worse.

### **Resources Are Available**

Additional information, self-help tools and other resources are available online at [www.MagellanHealth.com/member](http://www.MagellanHealth.com/member). Or call us for more information, help and support. Counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you.



**Employee Assistance Program**

*We care, just call.*

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1-888-262-7848 TTY Users

[www.FOH4YOU.com](http://www.FOH4YOU.com)

# EAP

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