

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

PTSD is a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced an overwhelming, scary, or dangerous event. It is natural to feel afraid during and after a traumatic situation. Fear triggers many split-second changes in the body to help defend against danger or to avoid it. This “fight-or-flight” response is a typical reaction meant to protect a person from harm.

When the symptoms last more than a month, seriously affect one’s ability to function, and are not due to substance use, medical illness, or anything except the event itself, they may be due to PTSD. Some people with PTSD don’t show any symptoms for weeks, months, or even years. PTSD is often accompanied by depression, substance use, or one or more anxiety disorders.

TREATMENT AND THERAPIES

Psychotherapy (sometimes called “talk therapy”) involves talking with a mental health professional to treat a mental illness. Effective psychotherapies tend to emphasize a few key components, including education about symptoms, teaching skills to help identify the triggers of symptoms, and skills to manage the symptoms.

Evidence-based therapies can include:

- **Exposure therapy** - This helps people face and control their fear. It gradually exposes them to the trauma they experienced in a safe way. It uses imagining, writing, or visiting the place where the event happened. The therapist uses these tools to help people with PTSD cope with their feelings.
- **Cognitive restructuring** - This helps people make sense of the bad memories. Sometimes people remember the event differently than how it happened. They may feel guilt or shame about something that is not their fault. The therapist helps people with PTSD look at what happened in a realistic way.
- **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)** - While thinking of or talking about the memories, the person will focus on other stimuli like eye movements, hand taps, and sounds. Like other kinds of counseling, it can help change how people react to memories of their trauma, focusing on increasing skills to manage life stressors in 4 modules: Mindfulness, Distress Tolerance, Emotional Regulation, and Interpersonal Effectiveness.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Re-experiencing symptoms include:

- Flashbacks—reliving the trauma over and over, including physical symptoms like a racing heart or sweating
- Bad dreams
- Frightening thoughts

Avoidance symptoms include:

- Staying away from places, events, or objects that are reminders of the traumatic experience
- Avoiding thoughts or feelings related to the traumatic event

Arousal and reactivity symptoms include:

- Being easily startled
- Feeling tense or “on edge”
- Having difficulty sleeping
- Having angry outbursts

Cognition and mood symptoms include:

- Trouble remembering key features of the traumatic event
- Negative thoughts about oneself or the world
- Distorted feelings like guilt or blame
- Loss of interest in enjoyable activities

- **Dialectical Behavior Therapy** can assist with learning coping skills to manage symptoms and trauma triggers.

MEDICATIONS

Several types of medications can help improve symptoms of PTSD:

- **Antidepressants.** These medications can help symptoms of depression and anxiety. They can also help improve sleep problems and concentration.
- **Anti-anxiety medications.** These drugs can relieve severe anxiety and related problems. Some anti-anxiety medications have the potential for abuse, so they are generally used only for a short time.
- **Prazosin.** Although not specifically FDA approved for PTSD treatment, prazosin may reduce or suppress nightmares in many people with PTSD.

Medications can treat PTSD symptoms alone or with therapy — but only therapy treats the underlying cause of your symptoms. If you treat your PTSD symptoms only with medication, you’ll need to keep taking it for it to keep working. Work with your prescriber to find the best medication or medication combination, as well as the right dose.

BEYOND TREATMENT: THINGS YOU CAN DO

Here are other things that may help you or a loved one during treatment for PTSD:

- Talk with your prescriber about treatment options.
- Engage in a mild physical activity or exercise to help reduce stress.
- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Break up large tasks into small ones, set some priorities, and do what you can as you can.
- Try to spend time with other people and confide in a trusted friend or relative. Tell others about things that may trigger symptoms.
- Expect your symptoms to improve gradually, not immediately.
- Identify and seek out comforting situations, places, and people.
- Continue to educate yourself about PTSD.



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IF YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT HARMING YOURSELF OR THINKING ABOUT SUICIDE:

- Tell someone who can help right away
- Call your licensed mental health professional if you are already working with one
- Call your prescriber
- Go to the nearest hospital emergency department

IF A LOVED ONE IS CONSIDERING SUICIDE

- Do not leave them alone
- Try to get your loved one to seek immediate help from a medical professional or the nearest hospital emergency room, or call 911
- Remove access to firearms or other potential tools for suicide, including medications

FOR IMMEDIATE HELP

If you are worried that you or someone you love needs help now, call one of the following 24/7 hotlines that specialize in providing emergency and crisis services in Western New York:

Erie County

(Crisis Services of Erie County)
(716) 834-3131

Buffalo & Erie County

(24 Hour Addiction Hotline)
(716) 831-7007

Niagara County

(Niagara County Crisis Hotline)
(716) 285-3515

Genesee County

(Care + Crisis Helpline):
(585) 344-4400
or 1-844-345-4400

Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

(Call or Text)
988

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT DEPRESSION?

MedlinePlus

National Library of Medicine:

<http://medlineplus.gov>

En Español:

<http://medlineplus.gov/spanish>

National Institute of Mental Health(NIMH)

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

National Center for PTSD

<https://www.ptsd.va.gov/index.asp>



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716.831.1800

With offices throughout Erie, Niagara and Genesee Counties.

