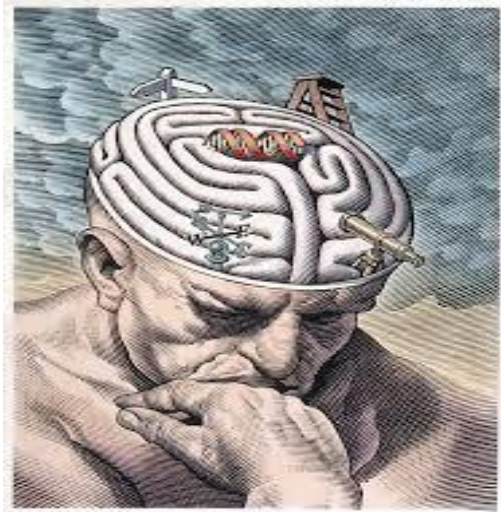


# A Guide To Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)



*Let Us  
Help Guide You Through The Maze!*



**About this Leaflet:** This document is for anyone who has experienced a traumatic, distressing or disturbing event and aims to provide some education around Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the effects of PTSD not just on the mind, but the body. This is a quick simple guide and it is not intended to provide all information or to be taken as such.

## What is a trauma?

Emotional and psychological trauma is the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter your sense of security, making you feel helpless in a dangerous world.

(1) A traumatic event is very personal and subjective but we can recognise events which are likely to result in traumatic responses.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can develop following an event that threatens your safety or makes you feel helpless. Most people associate PTSD with rape and battle-scarred soldiers—and military combat is the most common cause in men—but any event (or series of events) that overwhelms you can trigger PTSD, especially if the event feels unpredictable and uncontrollable. PTSD can affect:

- People who personally experience the traumatic event:
- Those who witness the event
- Those who pick up the pieces afterwards, such as emergency workers
- Friends or family members of those who experienced the trauma

Not all people experiencing acute stress disorder will go on to develop PTSD, however if their response to the traumatic event involves intense fear, helplessness or horror, it is estimated that 1 in 10 men and 1 in 5 women who experience a traumatic event will develop PTSD. (2)

## What is the difference between PTSD and Complex PTSD?

PTSD can come on after a singular traumatic event. Typical events would be either experiencing or witnessing

- A serious accident
- Violent, emotional or sexual assaults
- Natural or man-made disasters
- Being diagnosed with a life threatening illness or one that changes your life forever
- Terrorist attacks, military combat

Complex PTSD is when someone has repeatedly experienced trauma over a period of time; symptoms can start at any time after the event and are similar to those of PTSD.

Typical events would be experiencing

- Severe neglect or abuse as an adult or child
- Repeated violent, emotional or sexual assaults & abuse such as long term bullying, domestic abuse, torture and abusive imprisonment (3)

## Why are traumatic events so shocking?

They undermine our sense that life is fair, that it is reasonably safe and that we are secure. The symptoms of PTSD are part of a normal reaction to (3) such events.

## What does PTSD feel like?

Not everyone knows what you may have experienced in your past so some of the “symptoms” may seem out of character. You may also have many questions, like “What is happening to me.” “Why now?” Or you may make statements to yourself like “It is not going to get to me” or “I am stronger than this”.

PTSD develops differently from person to person. While the symptoms of PTSD most commonly develop in the hours or days following the traumatic event, it can sometimes take weeks, months, or even years before they appear.

### Symptoms of PTSD (4)

- **Re-experiencing the trauma** (recurrent dreams of the event, flashbacks and intrusive memories)
- **Anxiety** in situations that bring back memories of the trauma
- **Avoidance behaviour** (such as persistent avoidance of things associated with the event)
- **Emotional numbing** – changes in how happiness/sadness is experienced; less able to experience a full range of emotions (may continue for months or years)
- **Reduced interest** in others and the outside world
- **Persistent increased arousal** (constant watchfulness, irritability, jumpiness/being easily startled, outbursts of rage, insomnia)

## Other symptoms (3)

- muscle aches and pains
- diarrhoea
- irregular heartbeats
- headaches
- feelings of panic and fear
- depression
- drinking too much alcohol
- using drugs (including prescriptions & painkillers).

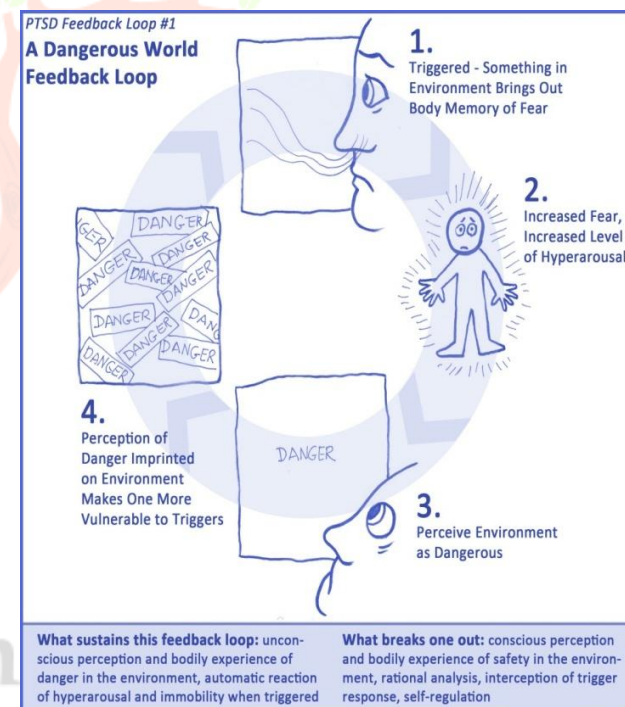
## Complex PTSD Symptoms

In conjunction with the other symptoms already mentioned someone with Complex PTSD may also experience deep feelings of anger, shame, guilt, disgust, self-blame, mistrust and hopelessness.

This is due to the trauma being repeated over a prolonged period of time. The victims are able to foresee their next traumatic experience although also unable to prevent it. Because the victim is unable to escape such event physically, they tend to escape through dissociating which although a completely normal reaction to protect our self; it can lead to other health problems. (3)

## Trauma and the Brain

The automatic mind & body response to frightening events and situations affects two main areas of the brain, including our *Prefrontal Cortex* and *limbic system* which then links to our Pituitary gland signalling our *Autonomic Nervous System* to release the chemicals needed that trigger our Flight, Fight or Freeze response. Together they respond to potential threats to keep us safe.



(Figure 1: The Art of Healing Trauma)

Any physical, emotional or environmental trigger will generate the same response and intrusive images and flashbacks as our mind tries to make a connection between our previous trauma and present trigger.

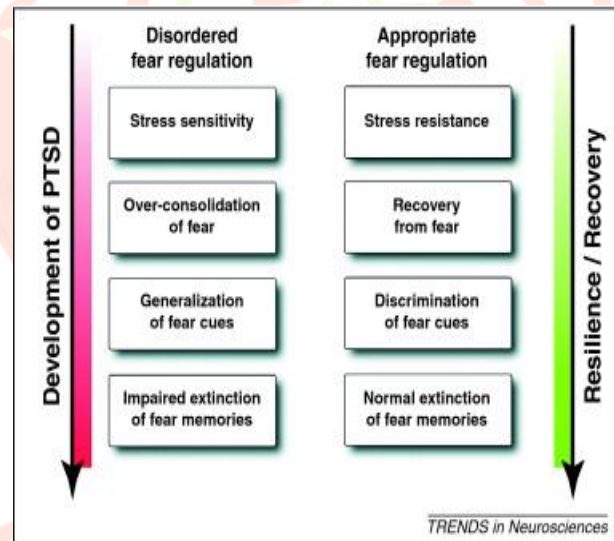
## How Can We Help? Step to step guidance

There is psychological trauma focused therapy available which will provide you with the necessary support and guidance, delivered by qualified counsellors.

We will structure your therapy sessions in such a way so as to understand your situation and to identify the most appropriate way to support you moving forward. The number of sessions required will ideally be determined before treatment starts and depends on the setting and severity of PTSD in the individual.

- **Session 1 – Diagnosis & Psycho education:** preparing both yourself & the therapist with details of your life and an explanation of how you & the therapist will be able to work together
- **Session 2 – Lifeline:** (the milestones) working through a chronological map of both positive and negative milestones
- **Session 3 – Narration:** Of the time before and during the first traumatic event – the therapist will document your description and will ask you to confirm or correct the narrative.
- **Session 4 (and onwards):** Re-visiting the narrative collected in the previous sessions, which may include narration of your subsequent life and other traumatic events
- **Final Session:** Re-visiting all narratives and signing-off of the sessions (5)

We will reassure you that stress reactions are normal responses to abnormal events. Such reactions include shock, fear, grief, emotional numbing, indecisiveness, worry, unwanted memories, fatigue, difficulty in sleeping, being easily startled, distrust and irritability. It is not unusual that these reactions will continue for days and even weeks after a trauma, however, in time most people have a normal recovery of their emotions.



(Figure 2: 2011 Elsevier Ltd. Published by Elsevier Inc)

We encourage you to reach out to other people who are able to provide support, and share feelings about what is happening. Talking to family, friends and work colleagues is advised. Follow your own instincts as to how much you are prepared to share and with whom. You should not stop reliving events or simply forget the trauma or just 'get on with your life'! (6)

## Further treatment & self care options

In helping yourself, try to remember and rehearse the following points:

### Don't .....

- Beat yourself up about it - PTSD symptoms are not a sign of weakness. They are a normal reaction of a normal person to terrifying experiences.
- Bottle up your feelings. If you have developed PTSD symptoms, don't keep it to yourself because treatment is usually very successful.
- Expect the memories to go away immediately; they may be with you for quite some time
- Expect too much of yourself. Give yourself a bit of slack while you adjust to what has happened.
- Stay away from other people
- Drink lots of alcohol or coffee or smoke more
- Get overtired or skip meals (3)

### During a panic:

- Remember: Anxiety symptoms can't harm you;
- Breathe through your nose and sit down if you can – the panic will soon pass;
- Think calmly & rationally about what is happening, do not talk yourself into more panic;
- Use distractions to focus away from the symptoms and worrying thoughts. (7)

## Generally:

- Learn to recognise what turns on your stress tap and change what you can to reduce the flow;
- Remember to try to drain your stress glass regularly with exercise, relaxation, and attend pleasant and interesting events;
- Face your fears systematically, progressing a day at a time;
- Develop your relaxation and distraction skills through regular practice;
- Learn to challenge irrational and negative patterns of thinking; and
- Examine your lifestyle and be prepared to change it where necessary. (7)
- Be careful generally & when driving – your concentration may be poor making accidents more likely
- Speak to a doctor and Expect to get better. (3)

## Body-focussed therapies:

These don't help PTSD directly, but can help to control your distress and hyper-arousal, the feeling of being 'on guard' all the time. These include physiotherapy and osteopathy, but also complementary therapies such as massage, acupuncture, reflexology, yoga, meditation and tai-chi. They can help you to develop ways of relaxing and managing stress.” (3)

## NICE Guidelines

NICE recommend treatment of trauma focussed cognitive behavioural therapy or eye movement desensitisation reprocessing (EMDR). For information and guidance that The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has issued to the NHS on the treatment and care of people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), please visit [www.nice.org/guidance](http://www.nice.org/guidance) and search for PTSD to view “Information for the public”. This is aimed at people with PTSD, their advocates and carers, and the public.

*“All healthcare professionals should treat you with respect, sensitivity and understanding, and explain PTSD and its treatment to you simply and clearly.”*

*“Supporting a person with PTSD may be quite distressing. If this is the case, and you need further help, healthcare professionals should be sympathetic and understanding, and offer you further information about self-help groups, support groups and voluntary organisations. You can find information about the important role of carers at the website*

[www.carers.gov.uk](http://www.carers.gov.uk)”

## We leave you with the following quotes....

- In the ‘now’ lies the source of our power
- In the ‘now’ it is possible to change
- The ‘NOW’ is all that matters (8)

## Resources and Other Contact Numbers

UK Psychological Trauma Society (UKPTS) clinical network of UK Traumatic Stress Services.

[www.ukpts.co.uk](http://www.ukpts.co.uk) or Telephone 07979 994 057

NHS111: Call 111, available 24 hours every day

Crisis Line on 0800 0234 650

Citizens Advice Bureau National phone service:

- for England call 03444 111 444 or check contact details via our local Citizens Advice search option
- for Wales call 03444 77 20 20
- TextRelay users should call 03444 111 445

## References

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9. Figure 1: <http://www.new-synapse.com/aps/wordpress/?p=263>
10. Figure 2: <http://www.cell.com/trends/neurosciences/fulltext/S0166-2236%2811%2900103-2>