

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

What are the symptoms, and how can you access help?



WHAT IS POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER?

PTSD a common mental health difficulty, and is one of the “anxiety disorders”. It’s very treatable if a person is given the right help.

PTSD can happen when we witness a traumatic event which is too big for our brains to process in that moment. The memory of the event becomes stuck in the emotional part of our brains rather than being stored away properly like our other memories.

This can lead to a variety of unpleasant symptoms, which may include nightmares and/or flashbacks.

These symptoms are all considered completely normal for the first month after a traumatic event. If they go on for longer than a month, or are particularly intense, it is advisable to seek help.

How Common is PTSD in frontline workers?

Since the start of COVID-19, studies have found very high rates of PTSD symptoms among front-line workers.

- Johnson, Ebrahimi & Hoffart (2020) found 29% had PTSD symptoms.
- Wild et al 2020 reported 44% had PTSD symptoms.

DO I HAVE PTSD?

Experiencing a trauma

Have you been exposed to death, threatened serious injury, or sexual assault? Most people with PTSD were directly involved in a traumatic incident, but some have PTSD from hearing about an event second hand.

‘Re-experiencing’ symptoms

- Are you having nightmares, and/or flashbacks about the traumatic event?
- Flashbacks are when memories of the event pop into your mind, and it feels as though it’s actually happening again.

Avoidance symptoms

- Are you avoiding places or things that remind you of the trauma?
- Or, are you avoiding thinking about it, or speaking about it?

Hyperarousal and reactivity

- Are you having trouble sleeping?
- Or are you very jumpy?
- It’s common to become very hypervigilant – over aware of everything around you.

Changes in thoughts and mood

- Is it hard to remember parts of the trauma?
- Have you been feeling very guilty about something that you did or didn’t do?
- Perhaps you’ve become isolated and lost interest in activities.



WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MYSELF

If it has been less than a month since the trauma, and you don't think that you need professional help yet, here are some self care ideas.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

- Find out what happened – it's better to know the details as it helps your brain to process the trauma.
- Try to rest. Sleep is often difficult immediately after a stressful incident, but when you are able, get plenty of it.
- Ask for support – from friends, your manager, and if the symptoms persist then from a professional – see last page of this leaflet.
- Talk it over with someone, bit by bit, at a pace that is reasonable for you. It's ok to feel very upset when talking about what has happened.



WHAT SHOULDN'T I DO?

- Don't try to fight any recurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks. They are normal and will most likely decrease over time and become less painful if you let them be. They are a sign your mind is processing what you have experienced.
- Try not to increase smoking, drinking, or recreational drug use.
- Don't take on too much. It can be helpful to go about some of your usual routine, but you also need time and space to process what has happened.
- Don't make any major life changes. Your decision making ability might not be at it's best at the moment, so any major life decisions can wait for now.



“I did everything I could to stop thinking about it but I just couldn’t get it out of my head. I felt so angry all the time, with myself for letting the patient down, and with my workplace for putting me in that position”

“The depth of my sorrow was no surprise to me, but I was totally unprepared for the other reactions – the shakes, nightmares, panic attacks, memory and concentration problems and the unrelenting exhaustion.”

“I cant talk about what happened. If anything reminds me of it I just clam up. There are parts of it that I cant even remember”

“I felt such overwhelming guilt and shame about what had happened. I thought I must be a terrible nurse, a terrible person”

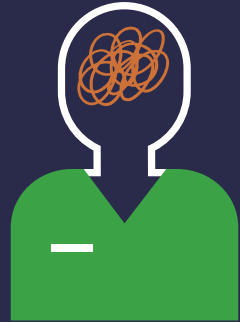
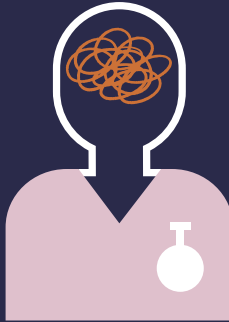
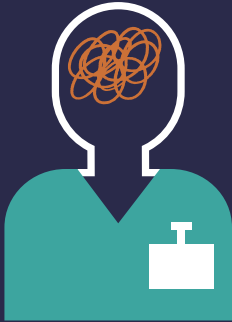
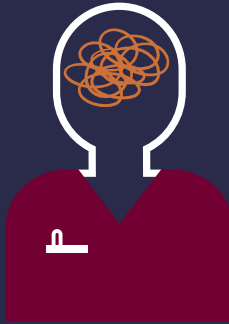
HOW DO I GET HELP?

There is now a service dedicated to helping staff who may be experiencing common mental health difficulties.

- You can refer yourself online.
- It’s completely confidential.
- If you like you can come just for a chat with a professional to see whether any further help is needed.
- If it is thought that you need further support, there are a range of treatment options.
- All treatment options have a good evidence base to show that they work, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

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