



Stress & Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a severe stress reaction from living through or seeing an event that threatens life. With PTSD, symptoms usually begin within 6 weeks to 3 months of the event. Symptoms of PTSD can begin years later, though. When symptoms do occur, they must last for at least one month for a diagnosis of PTSD to be made. PTSD is a medical diagnosis made by a mental health professional.

Signs & Symptoms

Physical symptoms of stress are: Increased heart rate and blood pressure; rapid breathing; and tense muscles.

Emotional reactions include being angry and having a lack of concentration.

Signs & Symptoms of PTSD in Adults

“Avoidance” Symptoms

- You avoid people, places, and activities that recall the event.
- You avoid thoughts, feelings, or mention of the event.
- You have much less interest in doing necessary activities.
- You feel detached or estranged from others.
- You forget an important aspect of the event.

“Increased Arousal” Symptoms

- You are very easily startled.
- You have a hard time concentrating.
- You have a hard time falling or staying asleep.
- You are very cranky.

“Re-experiencing the Event” Symptoms

- You have recurring, intrusive thoughts of the event that cause distress.
- You have nightmares.
- You have flashbacks of the event.



Stress & Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Continued

Signs & Symptoms of PTSD in Children
■ Crying.
■ Headaches and other physical complaints.
■ Thumb sucking.
■ Depression. Being inactive.
■ Bathroom accidents.
■ Fear of being alone. Clinging to others.
■ Nightmares. The child may not be able to recall the dream's contents.
■ Fear of weather.
■ Being irritable. Being confused.
■ Not being able to concentrate.
■ Aggressive behavior.
■ Withdrawal.
■ Expressing things or parts of the event in repeated play.

Other symptoms of PTSD are intense fear or horror and feeling helpless, in a “daze,” detached, etc.

Causes

Marriage or divorce, job loss or the threat of being fired, all create stress. So do countless other things.

Living through or seeing an event that threatens life can cause PTSD. Events include combat exposure, sexual or physical assault, and a serious accident. A past unhealed trauma increases the risk for PTSD. People with depression or other mental health conditions are also at greater risk.

Questions to Ask

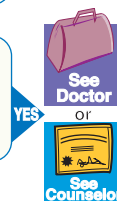
Does stress result in any of these problems?

- Suicide attempts, plans for suicide, writing a suicide note, or recurrent thoughts of suicide or death.
- Impulses or plans to commit violence.



NO

After being part of a traumatic event, are **signs and symptoms of PTSD** present?



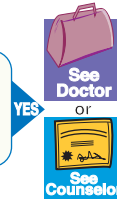
NO

Do you need alcohol and/or drugs to deal with stress?



NO

Are you often anxious or nervous, and/or confused about how to handle a problem?



NO

Does stress result in any of these problems?

- You withdraw from others.
- You can't do daily activities.
- You neglect to take care of your health.



NO



Self-Care / Prevention

- Maintain good health habits. Eat healthy foods. Get enough sleep.



Stress & Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Continued

Treatment

Self-care measures deal with most cases of stress. When these are not enough, counseling and/or medical care may be needed.

Professional treatment is needed for PTSD. Left untreated, PTSD will not go away and can greatly affect a person's life.



Get more information from:

HealthyLearn®
www.HealthyLearn.com
Click on MedlinePlus®

National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
www.ptsd.va.gov

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)
800.CDC.INFO
(232.4636)

www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/stress

- Limit caffeine. It causes anxiety and increases the stress response.
- If you drink alcohol, do so wisely.
- Get regular exercise.
- Check with your doctor about taking vitamins and minerals. This is especially true for ones labeled “stress tablets” or “stress formulas.”
- Don't let your emotions get “bottled up inside.” Share your feelings with others.
- Do a “stress rehearsal.” Imagine yourself feeling calm and handling the stressful situation.
- Balance work and personal life. Do things you enjoy and look forward to. Escape for a little while. See a movie, visit a friend, etc.
- Be with cheerful people. Help others.
- Reduce or manage exposure to things that cause stress.
- Rank order daily tasks. Don't commit to doing too much.
- Studies show that having a pet, such as a dog or cat, appears to buffer the effects of stress on health.
- View changes as positive challenges.
- Laugh a lot. Keep a sense of humor.
- Take a bath or shower with warm water. Listen to music that is calming.
- Reward yourself with little things that make you feel good. Give yourself some “me” time.
- Count to 10 when you're so upset you want to scream. This helps to calm you down. Avoid unnecessary arguments.
- Have a warm cup of herbal tea.
- Do relaxation exercises daily. Imagine a soothing, restful scene. Do deep muscle relaxation. (Tense and relax muscle fibers.) Meditate. Do deep breathing.
- Remember that it is not an event that causes stress, but how you react to it. Change your thoughts about an event to help manage stress.



Enjoy a pet.