

Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Following a traumatic event, almost everyone experiences at least some of the symptoms of PTSD. It's very common to have bad dreams, feel fearful or numb, and find it difficult to stop thinking about what happened. But for most people, these symptoms are short-lived. They may last for several days or even weeks, but they gradually lift.

If you have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), however, the symptoms don't decrease. You don't feel a little better each day. In fact, you may start to feel worse. But PTSD doesn't always develop in the hours or days following a traumatic event, although this is most common. For some people, the symptoms of PTSD take weeks, months, or even years to develop.

The symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can arise suddenly, gradually, or come and go over time. Sometimes symptoms appear seemingly out of the blue. At other times, they are triggered by something that reminds you of the original traumatic event, such as a noise, an image, certain words, or a smell. While everyone experiences PTSD differently, there are three main types of symptoms, as listed below.

Re-experiencing the traumatic event

- Intrusive, upsetting memories of the event
- Flashbacks (acting or feeling like the event is happening again)
- Nightmares (either of the event or of other frightening things)
- Feelings of intense distress when reminded of the trauma
- Intense physical reactions to reminders of the event (e.g. pounding heart, rapid breathing, nausea, muscle tension, sweating)

PTSD symptoms of avoidance and emotional numbing

- Avoiding activities, places, thoughts, or feelings that remind you of the trauma
- Inability to remember important aspects of the trauma
- Loss of interest in activities and life in general
- Feeling detached from others and emotionally numb
- Sense of a limited future (you don't expect to live a normal life span, get married, have a career)

PTSD symptoms of increased arousal

- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Irritability or outbursts of anger
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hypervigilance (on constant "red alert")
- Feeling jumpy and easily startled

Other common symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder

- Anger and irritability
- Guilt, shame, or self-blame
- Substance abuse
- Depression and hopelessness
- Suicidal thoughts and feelings
- Feeling alienated and alone
- Feelings of mistrust and betrayal
- Headaches, stomach problems, chest pain