

# Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

## Common Traits

### 1. Avoidance symptoms

People with PTSD try to avoid thoughts and feelings related to the traumatic event. They find it extremely difficult at times, as the traumatic images and memories intrude spontaneously.

Symptoms include:

- Avoidance of activities, places or people which remind them of their trauma.
- Difficulty remembering exactly what happened during exposure to their traumatic event (this reflects the intense fear at the time of exposure).
- Becoming less interested in hobbies and activities that they used to enjoy.
- Feeling detached and estranged from people, and feeling that nobody understands them – a tendency to isolate themselves.
- Becoming emotionally numb, and having trouble experiencing their feelings.
- A sense of futility in relation to their future and feeling that somehow they will be struck down by yet another disaster or tragedy.

### 2. Re-experiencing symptoms.

- Individuals with PTSD repeatedly re-live the event in at least one of the following ways:
- Intrusive unwanted memories of the traumatic event.
- Unpleasant nightmares which comprise replays of what happened. Night sweats.
- Flashbacks where they may suddenly act or feel as if they are re-living the event.
- They become emotionally upset if something reminds them of the traumatic experience.
- Palpitations, sweating, feeling tense or shaky if they are reminded about their traumatic experience.

### 3. Hyper-arousal symptoms.

Hyper-arousal symptoms cause problems with relationships, especially problems generated by irritability and anger. They include:

- Going out.
- Shopping.
- Crowds.



- Great difficulty falling or staying asleep.
- A tendency towards being irritable and angry at the slightest provocation and for trivial reasons.
- Driving.
- Trolley rage.
- A tendency to become aggressive, verbally or physically, or violent towards themselves or others.
- Great difficulty concentrating, and concentration usually requires effort.
- Remaining especially alert and watchful (hyper-vigilant).
- Looking for signs of danger in their environment and in an exaggerated way.

### **Other commonly associated symptoms.**

Feelings of guilt and difficulty relating to authority figures.

Guilt in relation to what one should or should not have done during the traumatic exposure.

Survivor guilt: others involved in the traumatic experience did not.

In many traumatic exposures, the individual may perceive that the system or hierarchy has let them down, and therefore anger and hostility can be a major factor in the presentation of PTSD.

Other areas to consider include:

Concentration/Memory/Orientation: difficulties, onset, impact on functioning.

Thought process

Thought content

Perception

Presentation: Level of engagement, co-operation, openness.

Insight

