

## Is it normal to feel emotionally distressed after experiencing a traumatic event?

It is absolutely normal to experience psychological distress after you've been exposed to a traumatic event. You may feel disbelief or overwhelmed, anxiety or experience nightmares. You may relive the traumatic event(s) and/or experience changes in your ability to cope on a day-to-day basis. These feelings and reactions usually diminish over the first one to four weeks after the traumatic event(s) and in many situations, can be resolved with psychological support, engaging in everyday healthy activities and working toward resuming a normal lifestyle.

## What is post-traumatic stress disorder?

A person may be diagnosed with PTSD if they experience a serious traumatic event\* and go on to suffer emotional and psychological distress for at least four weeks after the event. In the case of PTSD, the psychological distress the person feels must be ongoing and characterized by a specific set of symptoms that impair the person's daily function.

## What are some symptoms of PTSD?

Some of the symptoms of PTSD include:

- upsetting memories of the traumatic event(s) that the individual experiences without warning
- nightmares related to the traumatic event(s)
- flashbacks in which the individual feels or acts as if the traumatic event(s) were recurring
- avoidance of distressing thoughts or feelings about the traumatic event(s)
- a change in thoughts and mood related to the traumatic event
- feelings of detachment from others.

Other symptoms of PTSD may include feeling very nervous or on edge all the time, engaging in reckless behaviour, feeling easily startled and having a hard time concentrating or sleeping. The symptoms of PTSD can disrupt a person's social life, job or other important areas of his or her life.

Symptoms of PTSD usually begin within the first three months after a trauma, although there may be a delay of months or even years before the symptoms meet the criteria for diagnosis.

## What causes PTSD?

A PTSD diagnosis is rare. Not all traumatic experiences lead to PTSD and doctors aren't sure exactly what causes PTSD. As with most mental health problems, PTSD is likely caused by a complex mix of genetic, biological, personality and environmental factors.

## Who does PTSD affect?

PTSD can affect anyone. Workers who are more frequently exposed to serious traumatic events\* may experience higher rates of PTSD than others.

## How do I find out if I'm experiencing PTSD?

If you are unsure whether you are experiencing PTSD, talk to your family doctor or ask your doctor to refer you to a psychologist or psychiatrist. A physician or psychologist can diagnose PTSD using the most recent *Diagnostic and Statistical Standards Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association.

## What types of treatments are available to me?

If you experience persistent psychological distress after being exposed to a traumatic event, it's important to seek medical help. A physician or psychologist can clarify your diagnosis and begin proper treatment, which can include:

- support from family and friends
- one-on-one counselling
- counselling through support groups
- medication
- regular exercise
- developing and maintaining a regular routine
- resuming normal activities and a normal lifestyle.

\*A serious traumatic event is an event or events involving actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence.

