



Hope

Post-traumatic stress disorder Aetna Resources For LivingSM

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a type of anxiety disorder some people experience after being exposed to a traumatic event.

A traumatic event is one that's very scary and distressing. It might be an accident, assault, natural disaster, combat, crime or ongoing neglect. And you don't have to go through the event yourself to experience PTSD. Sometimes seeing, learning about or talking to others who went through the event can lead to a traumatic response.

What are the symptoms of PTSD?

PTSD symptoms look a little different in each person. Symptoms tend to fall into the following categories:

- **Intrusive memories.** Nightmares, unwanted memories, flashbacks, severe distress in response to reminders of the event
- **Avoidance.** Trying not to think or talk about the event or avoiding people, places and things that are reminders of the event
- **Negative thoughts and feelings.** Emotional numbness, guilt and shame, feeling detached from others and having negative views of yourself, others or the world
- **Changes in physical and emotional reactions.** Emotional outbursts, being easily startled and having trouble sleeping

Who tends to get PTSD?

Most people will feel some sort of distress after a stressful or upsetting event. But not everyone will develop PTSD. In fact, you might have a group of people who experience the same crisis. Some might experience PTSD. Others won't.

Doctors aren't sure why this is so. But it may come down to individual differences. These may include a mix of factors like:

- Past trauma
- Family history of depression and anxiety
- Ability to manage stress
- Access to supports

First responders and PTSD

First responders and military personnel are at particular risk for PTSD. They may encounter one crisis after another. Over time, this stress can hurt their physical and mental health. And this can make them more prone to PTSD.

But it may be hard for first responders to seek help. Trained to respond to trauma, they might feel pressure to be “trauma-proof”. Experiencing distress might make them worry that they’re not up to the job. They might believe that their feelings show weakness. And they might be afraid of others’ judgment.

But trying to hide or ignore your distress can lead to bigger problems. It can make it harder to deal with those thoughts and feelings. Fortunately, many first responder organizations are making it a priority to address PTSD and mental health.

Treatment for PTSD

Some people with PTSD will try to ignore their symptoms or turn to unhealthy ways of coping such as using drugs and alcohol. And this can lead to a substance use disorder, relationship issues and other problems. But there’s hope. Treatment can help with PTSD.

There are different treatment options. Some involve talking or thinking about the traumatic event under the guidance of a professional. Others may address unhealthy beliefs about the event. And medication prescribed by a doctor may help too. Treatment can be very effective and help people get back to a place of well-being.

We’re here for you. You can call us anytime. Confidential services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



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