

# PTSD Can Affect Anyone

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Millions of people are affected by PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome) each year and it can affect anyone in any age group. PTSD has been talked about in the media as a serious problem that affects soldiers returning from traumatic experiences involving combat.

As a result, soldiers are what most people think about when they hear, 'PTSD'. The fact about PTSD is that soldiers aren't the only ones who can be drastically affected by the debilitating reality of traumatic experiences – and it doesn't have to result from combat.

A person who has been in a car accident, storm, plane crash, been raped or suffered some other type of external trauma can develop emotional illnesses that may morph into depression – or PTSD.

## **Identifying PTSD**

Those who are experiencing PTSD have likely had a "fight or flight" response to a traumatic experience. This normal reaction to impending danger is ingrained in our psyche to prevent us from harm, but in PTSD, that natural response may deeply change a person.

Even though the person is out of danger and no longer needs to be afraid, he or she often reacts to non-threatening experiences and events with a "fight or flight" response.

The three characteristics of those suffering from PTSD experience are:

### **1. Exaggerated emotional and physical responses**

A person with PTSD might become frightened from loud noises or being surprised. He or she may begin to shake uncontrollably, shrink from the situation or leave the premises. Anxiety is always present in the PTSD patient.

## **2. Troubling Memories**

PTSD may cause a person to frequently recollect the traumatic event. He may become very irrational and emotions may run wild because he's mentally 'rewinding' the event and playing it in his mind over and over.

## **3. Problems Relating to Others**

The person with PTSD may have difficulty trusting anyone and become suspicious and jealous of those who love and want the best for them. The patient is often angry and depressed and extremely detached from loved ones.

PTSD patients think that no one understands them, so relationships are difficult to maintain. Other areas that become problematic for the PTSD patient are his job, performing the most basic of daily tasks and the fact that he can't comprehend that what he's afraid of isn't a real threat at that moment.

The mental stress of PTSD is devastating and can take a toll on the patient's relationships with others and the ability to function if not identified and treated properly. There are certain types of trauma that can easily cause PTSD.

### **Who Can Be Affected by PTSD?**

Besides traumatic combat experiences, there are other events that might precipitate PTSD. People of all ages and who have experienced all types of trauma may fall victim to this devastating disorder.

Other than combat veterans (mostly men) here are some trauma victims who are more likely to be affected by PTSD than others:

Children who have experienced trauma are one segment of the population. Children are some of the most likely victims to be affected by PTSD and react to it in various ways that could cause mental and physical illnesses.

Events such as car accidents, being bullied at school, violence at home, a loved one's death or illness, child abuse or a serious accident can precipitate PTSD in children.

Symptoms of PTSD in children include re-living the experience, nightmares, avoiding situations, blocking out his feelings and memory of the event and being easily frightened of events that pose no threat of harm.

If you notice some or all of these symptoms of PTSD in a child who has been through a traumatic event, make sure you seek help immediately from a health care professional.

Women are much more likely than men to develop PTSD and the reasons could stem from domestic violence, being neglected or abused as a child, being raped, physically attacked, being in accidents, having a crushing medical diagnosis or experiencing the loss of a child or other loved one.

Symptoms of PTSD in women might include severe depression, abuse of drugs or alcohol, developing an eating disorder or increasing the risk of heart disease, rheumatoid arthritis and chronic pain. Suicidal thoughts or actions and other maladies may also occur.

Treatment for PTSD in women might include anti-depressants or anxiety medication prescribed by a health care professional or therapy with a person licensed in counseling trauma victims.

People who are alone can suffer from PTSD. Although some people who are alone in life may enjoy it, most of us need a help and support system that we can call on when depressed or medically impaired. Those who have no one to talk to or interact with are much more likely to develop PTSD.

The elderly are sometimes at risk for PTSD when they're abruptly pulled away from their home and placed in a nursing facility. Friends may have passed on and family may live in other areas of the world.

It's a frightening experience to the elderly to be alone. Treatment can range from medication to counseling and helping the victim join in other activities as much as possible.

Anyone who has been through a traumatic experience is at risk. Men, women, children and the elderly may all experience PTSD if they're victims of extreme trauma.

Some events that could produce enough traumas to cause PTSD are sexual molestation, experiencing a threat by someone with a weapon, rape, kidnapping, car accident, devastating illness, natural disaster including hurricanes, tornados and earthquakes and civil happenings such as divorce or being sued.

Emergency response workers such as firefighters, medics, pilots and policemen are likely to develop PTSD if they witness or are part of a traumatic event where loss of life or devastation is involved.

Symptoms of PTSD you should look for are the same as the above, including suicidal thoughts, alcohol or drug abuse and depression.

Complications of PTSD are varied, including the disruption it can cause in jobs, relationships and functioning on a daily basis to complete even the most menial tasks or experiencing enjoyment in anything. PTSD shouldn't be ignored. It won't go away without treatment.

### **The Best Ways to Treat PTSD**

If you or someone you know falls victim to PTSD, treatment is imperative – and the sooner, the better. Symptoms may occur immediately after a traumatic experience or even months or years later.

One type of treatment doesn't fit all for those who suffer from PTSD, but there are various ways to get through the disorder and get rid of the symptoms that plague and disrupt your life. These include:

- Traditional "Talk Therapy" – Talking it through for PTSD patients is sometimes the best way to treat the disorder. Counselors and

psychotherapists that are specially trained in PTSD treatment can usually help the person find closure for the traumatic incident that has caused such a lifestyle change.

- Cognitive Therapy – This type of therapy helps a PTSD patient realize that events that took place weren't his fault and helps alleviate feelings of guilt. A therapist listens to the PTSD patient describe the traumatic event(s) in detail and then helps the person understand the incident and why it happened.

When the patient demonstrates that he or she has a good understanding of the event, he then knows that he was suffering stress because of his thoughts about the situation.

The next step is to learn to replace the frightening and negative thought with less traumatic thoughts and put the incident into perspective. These therapy sessions will help the patient learn how to cope with fear, anger and guilt that often plague people after a traumatic experience.

- Exposure Therapy – Eliminating fear is one of the goals of exposure therapy and is based on the theory that after a traumatic event happens, a person learns to be afraid of thoughts, feelings and circumstances that remind him of the traumatic happening.

A therapist can help the PTSD patient control those thoughts and feelings and learn how not to be frightened of the memories associated with the event. A PTSD patient might spend most of his life focusing on memories of the event and reliving it.

Exposure therapy can help "desensitize" the patient's reaction to the memories and replace them with less stressful thoughts. Relaxing is key to successful exposure therapy and the therapist might use breathing exercises to help with this.

- Support Groups – A supportive group of people can help PTSD patients overcome their fears and emotions. A group can be family members since they are most affected by the person's PTSD.

A good therapist will help the patient and family communicate with each other and voice concerns. Honesty is paramount in family group therapy and can help mend and foster relationships.

A supportive group therapy may also be with those who have experienced the same or similar traumatic experiences. Sharing stories and emotions with others who are in the same boat helps each person build trust and self-confidence and realize that he's not alone.

- EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) – An experienced counselor will help the patient change reactions to remembering a traumatic experience by focusing on the memories while performing certain actions.

Actions a patient might perform could be eye movements, sounds and tapping. The conclusion about EMDR is out as to how it works to solve problems, but studies suggest that PTSD patients experience fewer symptoms after the therapy.

- Light Therapy – One of the problems with PTSD is that sufferers have trouble sleeping. Light therapy has been shown to drastically reduce symptoms of PTSD and is a very inexpensive method of treatment.

Bright lights affect a person's internal clock and metabolism and also cause positive reaction to inflammation, immune system and stress such as that caused by traumatic experiences. Depression can also be alleviated with light therapy.

- Dog Therapy – It may seem out of the box, but dog therapy has been found to seriously help those who may be suffering from PTSD. A dog is known as a "soldier's best friend," and many dogs have had specific training to help soldiers with PTSD as a result of combat stress and experiences.

Dogs can help patients express and feel love again, they are great companions for those who feel alone and they can help reduce stress,

frustration and feelings of loneliness by encouraging outdoor walks and socialization with new people.

Dog therapy for PTSD patients hasn't definitely been proven to be an effective treatment for PTSD, but you may talk to your doctor or therapist about acquiring an emotional support dog that has been trained to help provide companionship for the patient.

- Yoga – Even the military is now using this ancient Eastern practice to treat soldiers with symptoms of PTSD and recognize its ability to help patients gain an awareness of his or her feelings and heal from the experience.

Yoga brings a sense of calm to both the mind and body and those who suffer from PTSD find that it helps them see things differently and recover enough to go on with their lives rather than reliving the past.

Anxiety caused by PTSD can also be relieved by practicing Yoga. The poses, stretching and meditative thoughts soothe mangled nerves and allow the person to calm him or herself without using medication, alcohol or other means to seek relief.

### **Recovering from PTSD**

Recovery from PTSD can take a long time, depending on how fast it's recognized in the patient as a problem and treatment it obtained. There are health professionals who specialize in the treatment of PTSD and can diagnose and prescribe the treatment that's going to be of most help for a child, woman, man or soldier.

Most treatment lasts from six to twelve weeks, but it could take more time, depending on the severity of the disorder. Even though good and helpful treatments are available, the person with PTSD may not recognize they're having a problem.

Sometimes PTSD can be treated by an antidepressant medication or SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) that can help with feelings of sadness and worry. Much of what causes PTSD are the chemicals in the

brain – and the lack of serotonin - so medications can be used with some success.

If you or a loved one is under treatment for PTSD, make sure you ask the therapist or health care professional how long the treatment may take and what you can expect from it.

It's very important that loved ones or others close to the patient get him to a therapist as soon as possible, so helping the person recognize the PTSD is vital. Make sure you research and discover all you can about the symptoms of PTSD, treatment and recovery options.

Online help is readily available and your health care professional can also point you in the right direction to get help for PTSD.



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