

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

About 12% of Australians and 30% of military personnel will develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder – what is it and what can be done to help people who suffer from it?

What is PTSD?

- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a set of reactions that many people develop after going through a traumatic event that threatened their life, safety or the people around them. The event may be a traffic accident, a disaster such as a bushfire, war or torture.

Who develops PTSD?

- Anyone who goes through a traumatic event, such as an assault or living in a war zone, may develop PTSD. Having past traumas, being under stress at the time of the trauma or if the trauma goes on for some time (as in combat) increases the likelihood of developing PTSD.
- Military personnel and first responders have a high risk of developing PTSD.

What are the Symptoms of PTSD?

- Although people with PTSD often experience panic or extreme fear, there are four main difficulties they experience:
 - Reliving the traumatic event through reoccurring and unwanted memories of the event, including flashbacks and nightmares. These may cause intense emotional distress and physical reactions such as heart palpitations.
 - Being overly alert which can cause sleep problems, irritability and lack of concentration.
 - Avoiding reminders of the event such as activities, people or places and not talking about the event.
 - Feeling emotionally numb, losing interest in daily activities, feeling detached from friends and family, difficulty feeling positive emotions or feeling hopeless.
- People with PTSD also often experience anxiety and depression.

Can PTSD be Treated?

- When people survive a traumatic event they feel fear, anxiety, anger, depression, guilt. This is normal. Most people who experience this won't develop PTSD especially if they are supported and other stresses minimised in the first few days.
- Many people who do develop PTSD will learn to manage their symptoms without help. Where the symptoms interfere with normal living, psychotherapy and medication may be required.

What can Help?

- Taking care of yourself – eat healthily and get enough sleep. Avoid nicotine or excess caffeine as these can promote anxiety and avoid alcohol which contributes to depression.
- Relaxation – meditation, breathing exercises, stretch and relax exercise can all promote relaxation.
- Exercise – regular exercise can help to move the “stress hormones” – but be careful! Strenuous exercise will increase these hormones and it may take some time to ease back down.
- Staying connected – spend time with supportive or caring people. Sharing a hug can help!
- Find a new focus – a sport or new hobby can introduce a new interest and maybe new people – the Invictus Games are a good example of this!
- Release tight muscles – stretching, a massage or sauna can help to release tight muscles.
- Acupuncture – acupuncture can help with relaxation and tight muscles.