

## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) A Real Illness



### Does This Sound Like You?

Look carefully at the following problems.

- I have lived through a very scary and dangerous event.
- I feel like the terrible event is happening all over again.
- This feeling often comes without warning.
- I have nightmares and scary memories of the terrifying event.
- I stay away from places that remind me of the event.
- Sometimes I tremble and feel very upset when something unexpected happens.
- I have a hard time trusting or feeling close to other people.
- I get mad very easily.
- I feel guilty because others died and I lived.
- I have trouble sleeping, my muscles are tense and I just don't feel well.

If you think some of these problems sound like you, you may have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a **real** illness that needs to be treated. It's not your fault if you have this illness, and you don't have to suffer. You **can** learn how to get help. You **can** feel better and get your life back!

### What is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

PTSD is a real illness. People may get PTSD after living through a terrible and scary experience. It can be treated with medicine and therapy.

You can get PTSD after you have been:

- Raped or sexually abused
- Hit or harmed by someone in your family or another trusted person
- A victim of a violent crime
- In an airplane or car crash
- In a hurricane, tornado, or fire
- In a war
- Forced to become a refugee
- In an event where you thought you might be killed
- After you have seen any of these events

If you have PTSD, you often have nightmares or scary thoughts about the terrible experience you went through. You try to stay away from anything that reminds you of your frightening experience.

You may feel angry and unable to care about or trust other people. You are always on the lookout for danger. You feel very upset when something happens without warning.

### When does PTSD start and how long does it last?

For most people, PTSD starts within about three months of the terrible event. For some people, signs of PTSD don't show up until years later. PTSD can happen to anyone at any age. Even children can have it. Some people get better within six months, while others may have the illness for much longer.

### Am I the only person with this illness?

No. You are not alone. In any year, 5.2 million Americans have PTSD.



### **What can I do to help myself?**

Talk to your doctor about the terrible event and your feelings. Tell your doctor if you have scary memories, depression, trouble sleeping, or anger. Tell your doctor if these problems keep you from doing everyday things and living your life. Tell your doctor how you feel. Ask your doctor for a checkup to make sure you don't have some other illness. Ask your doctor if he or she has helped people with PTSD. Special training helps doctors treat people with PTSD. If your doctor doesn't have special training, ask for the name of a doctor or counselor who does.



### **What can a doctor or counselor do to help me?**

A doctor may give you medicine to help you feel less afraid and tense. But it may take a few weeks for the medicine to work. Talking to a specially trained doctor or counselor helps many people with PTSD. This is called "therapy." Therapy can help you work through your terrible experience.

### **Here is one person's story:**

"After I was attacked, I felt afraid, depressed, and angry all the time. I couldn't sleep or eat much. Even when I tried to stop thinking about it, I still had awful nightmares and memories. I was confused and didn't know where to go for help. A friend told me to call the doctor. My doctor helped me find a special doctor who knows about PTSD. I had to work hard, but after some helpful medication and therapy, I

am starting to feel like myself again. I'm glad I made that first call to my doctor. "

**Remember - you can get help now: Talk to your doctor about the terrible event and your feelings.**

Get more information.

Call 1-88-88-ANXIETY (1-888-826-9438). It is a free call.

You will get free information about PTSD mailed to you.

You can also find free NIMH information online at [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

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