Treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder

Almost everyone who experiences a traumatic event will be emotionally affected in some way. For some, the effects can last a long time.

If you are still experiencing problems two weeks after a traumatic event, you might have some form of posttraumatic mental health condition. To ask for help, go to your doctor. Your doctor will decide if you need treatment, and may refer you to a mental health professional such as a:

- counsellor,
- psychologist, or
- psychiatrist.

There are different treatments for posttraumatic stress disorder that work. For example:

- counselling,
- medication, or
- a combination of both.

These treatments can work even if your traumatic experience was a long time ago.

Counselling and psychological treatments for adults

When treating PTSD, we recommend taking a step-by-step approach. For example, it is generally best to start with counselling, rather than use medication as the first and only solution to the problem.

These are the types of counselling that work best to treat PTSD:

- Trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy (TF-CBT)
- Cognitive processing therapy (CPT)
- Trauma-focused cognitive therapy
- Prolonged exposure
- Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR).

You can read more about the treatment types on **this page**.

These types of PTSD treatment will help you learn:

- Ways to confront and come to terms with painful memories, thoughts and images so you don't feel as distressed by them
- Strategies to help you get back into activities or visit places that you have avoided since the trauma because they have been too distressing

- Tools to help you relax when you start getting too anxious or wound up
- To explore thoughts that may make your memories of the event more painful

Medications

The medications usually used to treat PTSD are antidepressants. Even if you don't have depression, antidepressants can help make feelings associated with trauma more manageable. Research has shown that certain types of antidepressants are more likely to help. For example:

- some selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), and
- a serotonin noradrenaline reuptake inhibitor (SNRI).

Treatment for children and adolescents with PTSD

If your child or teenager is not recovering after a traumatic event, their doctor may refer them to a mental health professional for trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy. The mental health professional will either provide the treatment to your child/adolescent alone, or together with you as their parent/caregiver. The mental health professional will also adjust the treatment to suit your child's developmental stage. The treatment involves the following:

- Learning about the type of traumatic event experienced (e.g., how common it is), and common reactions to trauma
- Teaching children to relax and manage anxiety
- Helping children to create a reasonable story of the traumatic event, and correct beliefs about the event that are hurting them (e.g., self-blame)
- Slowly exposing the child to objects related to the trauma or to situations that they fear or avoid
- Helping children to get back into everyday activities
- Supporting families

The doctor may also recommend EMDR if trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy is not available.

For more information

- To get help right now, call Lifeline on 13 11 14
- Talk to your doctor about how to get help
- Download a copy of **Recovery after Trauma** – A Guide for People with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, **Dealing with Trauma** – A Guide For Young People Who Have Experienced Trauma, **Helping My Children After Trauma** – A Guide for Parents
- **Visit our website** for other useful resources