

Momentum

Coping with the challenges of PTSD



Employee Assistance Program
For Professional Consultation

Call 1-800-356-7089

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Coexisting conditions

- ✓ Approximately 44 million U.S. adults experience a diagnosable mental disorder in any given year, yet nearly 60 percent are not treated.
- ✓ About 90 percent of people who commit suicide have a diagnosable mental disorder. Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the U.S.
- ✓ Friends and loved ones can make a big difference for someone with mental health problems. You can reach out and be available, encourage treatment, and help dispel negative stigmas.

What is PTSD?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a very real illness that can make daily life deeply uncomfortable. The experience of a frightening event or ordeal can trigger the body's biological responses. While fight-or-flight responses can be life-saving during a crisis, they can also leave people with ongoing psychological impairment.

Traumatic events that can trigger PTSD include violent personal and/or sexual assaults, natural disasters, military combat, accidents, mass violence incidents, childhood abuse, or a loved one's sudden death. PTSD can affect both those directly involved in a traumatic event and those who witness or are closely affected by the event.

When people suffer with PTSD, the disorder may cause them to:

- Repeatedly recreate a traumatic event in their minds through flashbacks or nightmares;
- Avoid people, places, or activities that could trigger memories of the event; and
- Exhibit hypervigilance, or extreme alertness to the perceived presence of danger.

If you believe that you or a loved one are experiencing the symptoms of PTSD, it is vital to obtain an evaluation and receive treatment from a mental health care professional who is experienced in treating trauma victims.

Sources: PTSD Alliance, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

People who suffer with PTSD aren't "crazy" or "weak." Experienced by over seven million U.S. adults annually, PTSD alters and disrupts brain chemistry—requiring professional intervention just like cancer or diabetes.



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Signs and symptoms of PTSD

The symptoms of PTSD can disrupt your everyday life and activities. A diagnosis of PTSD is given when the following types of symptoms have lasted more than one month.

- Nightmares related to the traumatic event
- Intrusive memories such as flashbacks—like the event is happening again
- Distressing reactions to reminders of the traumatic event, such as an anniversary
- Feeling numb or like nothing matters
- Avoidance of thoughts, people or situations that are reminders of the event
- Persistent negative thoughts
- Physical sensations—pain, sweating, nausea or trembling
- Distorted sense of blame for one's self or others, related to the event
- Disturbing emotions related to the trauma, such as horror, shame or sadness
- Severely reduced interest in pre-trauma activities
- Feeling detached or isolated from others
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability, increased temper or anger
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Hypervigilance—being tense and easily startled
- Depersonalization—feeling disconnected from oneself
- Dissociation—such as out-of-body experiences or feeling that the world is “not real” (de-realization).

Sources: NAMI, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs - National Center for PTSD, PsychCentral.com.

Treatment resources for PTSD



Behavioral therapies

Through “talk” therapy such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, a mental health professional helps the individual suffering with PTSD establish healthier thought patterns and behavioral responses. Family therapy can help close relatives cope better with a family member's PTSD problems, which may include the apparent rejection of loved ones.



Medication

A physician may prescribe an antidepressant medicine such as sertraline (Zoloft), paroxetine (Paxil) or venlafaxine (Effexor). These support psychotherapy by controlling PTSD symptoms such as sadness, numbness, worry and anger. Medication may only be required for a few weeks, but in some cases it may be needed for several years.



Peer support

People who meet with other survivors of traumatic events benefit from sharing their experiences and helping each other regain confidence. To locate support groups, search online or consult with your family doctor, social worker or mental health counselor/clinic. Also, call your program's toll-free number or log on to MagellanHealth.com/member.



Webinar—Please join us on June 8, 2016 for this month's enlightening webinar entitled, *Trauma and PTSD*. Register [here](#).