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 [An article on this topic is available in this issue of AFP.](#)

## **What You Should Know About Post-traumatic Stress Disorder**

### **What is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)?**

PTSD is an illness (sometimes called an anxiety disorder) that can happen after a traumatic event. The event may be a serious car crash, a natural disaster such as a hurricane or an earthquake, military combat, or a crime such as rape.

Not everyone develops PTSD after a traumatic event. Those who do may feel alone, or they may feel guilty that they survived when others did not. In people with PTSD, anxiety can last for months and even years after the event.

### **How can I tell I have PTSD?**

Your doctor can tell you have PTSD by talking with you about your symptoms and experiences. If you have PTSD, you may have vivid nightmares, flashbacks, and bad memories. You may not be able to stop thinking about the traumatic event. Any reminder of the event may cause fear or panic.

If you have PTSD, you may get an upset stomach or a headache when you are reminded of the event. You may try to avoid thoughts, feelings, people, and places that are connected with the traumatic event. You may have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. You may feel irritable or become angry easily. You may have trouble paying attention.

### **How is PTSD treated?**

Your doctor may prescribe a medicine for depression or anxiety. You should try to be consistent with sleep habits. Talking to a mental health professional also can help. This therapy usually consists of weekly or monthly sessions that last about one hour each.

With treatment, symptoms of PTSD usually get better within a few months. However, some people with PTSD may need treatment for a long time.

Here are some things that you can do to help yourself:

- Take your medicine just the way your doctor tells you.
- Try to lie down to sleep at the same time every night.
- Have a place to sleep that is dark and quiet, and has a comfortable temperature.
- Try not to eat within two hours of lying down to sleep.
- Get regular physical exercise and eat a balanced diet.

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This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

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