



Information Sheet: PTSD

What is PTSD?

Post-traumatic stress disorder - or PTSD - is an anxiety disorder that some people get after seeing or living through a dangerous event.

When in danger, it's natural to feel afraid. This fear triggers many split-second changes in the body to prepare to defend against the danger or to avoid it. This "fight-or-flight" response is a healthy reaction to protect a person from harm. But in PTSD, this reaction is changed or damaged: Sufferers may feel stressed or frightened even when no longer in danger.

PTSD can occur after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event e.g. military conflict; road accident; act of terrorism; violent attack, sexual assault, robbery or domestic abuse. PTSD may also occur in other situations where a person feels extreme helplessness, horror or fear.

PTSD can develop immediately after a trauma or not for many years. While major life events such as getting divorced or losing a job are often described as being traumatic – and are of course very distressing – they do not usually lead to PTSD developing.

Up to 30% of people who have experienced trauma develop PTSD. Other factors will increase the risk of a person developing PTSD e.g. exposure to previous trauma, pre-existing mental illness, drug use, and unhelpful coping styles.

PTSD affects about 5% of men and 10% of women at some point in their lives. It can occur at any time, including in childhood. Features associated with PTSD include depression, substance abuse and increased suicide risk.

If you are concerned you might have PTSD symptoms, which have not improved six weeks after a trauma, contact your GP who can make a diagnosis and recommend any treatment.

Symptoms of PTSD

Symptoms can include: intrusive thoughts or feelings e.g. flashbacks, feeling overwhelmed by emotions; hyper-arousal e.g. over-reacting to sudden noises or movements; having panic attacks and experiencing sleeplessness; avoidant behaviours e.g. avoiding situations that might remind you of the event; feeling numb, losing confidence and affection for others, mechanical actions and inappropriate reactions.

Treatment of PTSD

PTSD can be successfully treated even when it occurs many years after the trauma. Depending on the severity of the symptoms, and how long they developed after the trauma, a number of treatments are available including:

- watchful waiting (to see if the symptoms go away naturally);
- psychological therapies, including counselling;
- EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing);
- medication;
- self-help; and
- support groups.

How Community Counselling can help

Community Counselling currently provides EMDR treatment for patients with trauma-related symptoms who are patients of Norwood House in Scarborough only. Longer-term, Community Counselling is seeking funding to provide EMDR treatment to people living in Ryedale and other parts of Scarborough also.

Other sources of information

www.nhs.uk/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder

Self-help books: 'Understanding your reactions to trauma' by Dr Claudia Herbert