



KINERGY
Listen Believe Support & Empower

What is PTSD?

PTSD is short for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. This is a mental health condition, which develops when an individual is exposed to an event they find extremely traumatic.

If you think you may be suffering with PTSD, contact your GP who can make a referral for you. PTSD needs to be diagnosed by a qualified professional, such as a psychiatrist

What causes PTSD?

Although the reasons why some people develop PTSD when exposed to trauma while others don't is unclear, we do know this develops as the result of someone witnessing (or being involved in) an event they find extremely traumatic. Historically this condition was associated with soldiers returning from war, suffering with 'shell shock', however, we do know that there can be a multitude of events that cause this condition.

Although this list is not exhaustive, known causes can be:

- Taking part in military combat
- Miscarriage
- Bereavement
- Being a victim of a violent attack (such as a robbery or sexual assault)
- Being involved in or witnessing a serious accident
- Being involved in or witnessing a terrorist attack
- Being involved in or witnessing a natural disaster (such as an earthquake or tsunami)

What are the symptoms of PTSD?

Trauma can be a unique experience. Not everyone who experiences a trauma will feel the same way about it as another person. For instance, if 2 people are in a car crash, one of them may be unaffected by it and experience little or no trauma – the other person involved may find it much more traumatic and, therefore, harder to process. Because of this, one person's symptoms may be very different to another's.

While not exhaustive, some of the common symptoms are:

- Re-living or re-experiencing the event (also known as 'Flashbacks')
- Re-living sensations such as tastes, smells, or sounds associated with the trauma
- Avoidance (not talking about the event, or avoiding the place the event happened)
- Hyper-arousal (not being able to 'shut down')
- Extreme anxiety and panic attacks
- Sleep problems (such as insomnia or nightmares)
- Being 'jumpy' (startled by sudden noises or movements)
- Feeling 'numb' (shutting off your feelings, or feeling physically detached from your body – this is sometimes referred to as 'Dissociation')
- Feeling like it was your fault
- Feeling guilty or shame (sometimes known as 'survivor's guilt')

How is PTSD treated?

While some symptoms of PTSD, such as anxiety and depression, may be treated medically by your GP (with antidepressants etc.), talking therapies have been proven to be extremely effective in treating PTSD.

TF-CBT (Trauma-focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy), is a specific type of CBT that has been adapted for PTSD. When we experience extreme trauma, the way we think and feel will often become disorganised and have an impact on the way in which we behave. With this type of therapy, a person suffering with PTSD will look at their feelings and behaviours and work with a therapist to develop healthier and more rational ways of thinking. This allows them to process the trauma and come to terms with what has happened, as well as providing self-coping mechanisms an individual can use once therapy has ended.

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing) is a relatively new treatment for PTSD. The theory behind this therapy is that the traumatic memory (or memories) a person experiences become 'stuck'. In order to 'unstick' the memory, a person talks about the traumatic event while being asked to move their eyes from side to side. They may also be exposed to other external stimuli, such as having music played into each ear alternatively or being gently tapped on each hand alternatively. Though it is not fully understood why this is successful, it is thought that the additional stimuli create distraction for the brain, allowing a person to process the memory less vividly. As the memory becomes less intense, our capacity to process the trauma increases

Further Reading

If you're suffering with PTSD, you might also want to read our guides on C PTSD, breathing techniques, distraction and grounding techniques, or meditation and mindfulness.