Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Preview Points

- Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) stems from emotionally or physically traumatic events in a person’s life. The symptoms may not show for a number of weeks, months, or years.
- These may come from a traumatizing event: military, emergency, hostage, accidents, violent encounters, sexual assaults (including military sexual trauma), or other extreme and difficult situations. These may stem from car accidents.
- There are healthy ways to cope with PTSD.

Contents

Some 8% of men and 20% of women develop post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after a traumatic event. Approximately 3.6 percent of US adults aged 18 to 54 have PTSD during a given year. PTSD may range from light symptoms to “clinically serious reaction symptoms.”

PTSD may affect a person’s moods, resulting in the person lashing out in irritation or anger for no apparent reason. It may affect a person’s level of sexual desire and intimacy with a significant other or spouse. PTSD puts a lot of stress on people’s personal lives. It may also lead to and / or worsen substance abuse.

Dr. Diane England explains: “A brain impacted by trauma reacts by sending a message of danger to the body. The body then slips into survival mode, a fight-or-flight reaction. ..When someone develops PTSD, something different happens. It’s as if the fight-or-flight reaction never shuts off. As a result, the system of the PTSD sufferer remains aroused, prepared both emotionally and physically to engage in fight or flight. The sufferer typically experiences significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, and
other important areas. Needless to say, this is detrimental to the PTSD sufferer’s physical body, mental well-being, and relationships with others.” (pp. 3 – 4)

Those who are veterans may have had repeated exposures to traumatizing events: “For the veteran with PTSD, repeated exposure to life-threatening trauma saturates the subconscious mind with the experience of terror and helplessness to such a degree that it chronically invades the conscious mind—it creates the conscious expectation that ordinary, everyday events will be life threatening and heartbreaking, and that ‘there isn’t anything I can do about it.’” (Levy, 2009, p. 105)

**SYMPTOMS OF PTSD:**

- Recurring thoughts or nightmares about the traumatizing event, experiencing vivid flashbacks
- Trouble sleeping / insomnia
- Changes in appetite
- Experiencing anxiety or fear in similar situations or events
- Being overly alert or easily startled
- Feeling depressed or having low energy
- Experiencing memory problems, including difficulty with remembering aspects of the traumatic situation
- Feeling irritable or resentful or angry
- Feeling scattered or unable to focus on work or daily activities
- Feeling emotionally numb or disconnected from others
- Spontaneously crying and feeling hopeless
- Feeling extremely protective of loved ones, feeling fearful for their safety
- Not being able to face certain aspects of the trauma
- Avoiding places, activities and people that remind the person of the event
- Feeling different from others
- Relying on alcohol or drugs to get through the day
- Sexual dysfunction
- Suicidal feelings

**POSITIVE WAYS TO COPE:** Use these positive ways of coping.

1. Learn about trauma and PTSD.
2. Talk to a trusted person for support. (People who have others they trust and can share with tend to cope more positively with PTSD.)
3. Talk to your doctor about the trauma and PTSD.
4. Practice relaxation methods.
5. Increase positive distracting activities.
6. Call a counselor for professional help. For example, some military personnel and military veterans will revisit their traumatic experiences from their “Alive Day,” when they may have become severely injured or witnessed deeply traumatizing combat.

7. Join a support group of others with similar traumas and understandings.

8. Build up relationships with family and friends.

9. Take doctor-prescribed medicines to handle PTSD.

10. Start an exercise program.

11. Volunteer in the community.

**Community Resources:** Connection to a larger personal and professional community is important for people’s well being. However, not all communities have sophisticated support services for people with PTSD. It may take some work to tap into this support community. Communities have different continuums of rehabilitation services.

**NEGATIVE WAYS TO COPE:** The panic attacks and senses of loss of control may leave people feeling desperate to avoid the difficult emotions. It may also make them feel alienated from others who seem like they’re living very different lives. The invisibility of PTSD to the larger world may make those who suffer from it feel even more isolated. Avoid these following negative ways of coping. These strategies perpetuate the problems.

1. Use alcohol or drugs.
2. Isolate socially.
3. Become angry, which keeps people away.
4. Continuously avoid the traumatizing aspects.

**Longer-Term Effects:** Untreated PTSD may result in strained relationships. It may have outsized impacts on the children in a family. (Genhart, 2009, pp. 133 – 136)

It may result in huge financial stresses on people as they become less able to cope with life’s challenges. People’s quality of life may be severely changed from different traumatizing events, and these may affect physical and mental health issues.

**Concluding Points**

- People who experience a traumatic event may experience PTSD.
- PTSD may be addressed in ways that are healthy vs. those that are unhealthy.
- Many ordinary people experience PTSD, so those who experience it should not feel alone.
- Those with PTSD should get professional help because there are many potential negative implications of untreated PTSD, including heightened suicide risks.
References

