

 **M.I.N.D**

**PTSD**



## Post-Traumatic stress disorder PTSD

### Introduction

Post-traumatic stress disorder, also known as PTSD, is among a few mental disorders that are triggered by a disturbing outside event.

Many persons experience traumatic events such as car and airplane accidents, sexual assault, domestic violence, wars and natural disasters, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and tornadoes, which affect multiple people simultaneously. PTSD is a state in which you "can't stop remembering."

Many victims of such events have trouble coping with the experience, where the adjustment period could last from months to years.

### Overview and Facts

Being a victim of the PTSD may often lead to other disorders such as:

- Drug & alcohol abuse
- Depression including suicidal thoughts and actions
- Anxiety

Moreover PTSD might increase the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases and symptoms such as: cardiovascular disease, chronic pain, autoimmune diseases (rheumatoid arthritis and thyroid disease).

According to studies done by IDRAAC, PTSD affects 3.4% of the Lebanese population. Also, among the people who have been subject to sexual assault, 16.8% have PTSD and among the persons who were subjected to rape for example, 98% have PTSD.

### Symptoms

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder includes 3 types of symptoms:

- Intrusive memories: mostly manifested as flashbacks (could last from days to months), and upsetting dreams
- Avoidance:
  - Trying to avoid thinking or talking about the event
  - Feeling emotionally numb
  - Avoiding activities you once enjoyed
  - Hopelessness about the future
  - Memory problems
  - Trouble concentrating
  - Difficulty maintaining relationships
- Anxiety:
  - Irritability or anger
  - Overwhelming guilt or shame
  - Trouble sleeping
  - Being easily startled or frightened

- Hearing or seeing things those are not there (or real)

Having a wide range of emotions is normal after a traumatic event, but in case the symptoms last more than a month, with consistent intensity, or having thoughts about harming yourself or others around you, you should seek professional care as soon as possible.

## **Causes and Risk Factors**

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder can be triggered as a mix of factors:

- Early childhood experience
- Severity of trauma
- Regulation of hormones and chemicals in the brain as stress is released.

Although anyone can be a victim PTSD, the likeliness is slightly increased if:

- Being a woman
- If you have been abused as a child
- You experienced trauma earlier in life
- You don't have a support system
- You have family history of depression

Experiences leading to PTSD mostly include:

- Combat exposure
- Rape
- Sexual assault
- Physical attack or weapon threat
- Fire
- Robbery
- Natural disasters

## **Tests and Diagnosis**

To diagnose PTSD, a person should consult a mental health professional who will rely on scientific criteria to check whether he/she has that disorder. The doctor will perform a full examination including a mental health assessment. Also, lab tests can be ordered to rule out other conditions that can cause similar symptoms.

The patient will be asked question concerning the intensity, frequency and duration of signs and symptoms the patient has been experiencing.

## **Treatment**

PTSD is treated by a combination of therapy and medications.

- Medications:
  - Antidepressants: These medications are most commonly used and can help symptoms of both depression and anxiety. They also improve sleep problems and concentration.
  - Anti-anxiety medications: can improve feelings of anxiety and stress.
  - Antipsychotics. In some cases, they can be prescribed for a short course to relieve severe anxiety and related problems, such as difficulty sleeping or emotional outbursts.

- Psychotherapy:
  - Cognitive therapy. This type of talk therapy helps you recognize the ways of thinking (cognitive patterns) that are keeping you stuck — for example, negative or inaccurate ways of perceiving normal situations. In PTSD treatment, cognitive therapy often is used along with a behavioral therapy called exposure therapy.
  - Exposure therapy. This behavioral therapy technique helps you safely face the very thing that you find frightening, so that you can learn to cope with it effectively. A new approach to exposure therapy uses "virtual reality" programs that allow you to re-enter the setting in which you experienced trauma.
  - Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR). This type of therapy combines exposure therapy with a series of guided eye movements that help you process traumatic memories.

### Sources and Links

[www.idraac.org](http://www.idraac.org)  
[www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)  
[www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)