

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can happen after witnessing or going through a traumatic event. It's normal to notice changes in the way that you feel, think, and experience the world around you after going through a traumatic event. Some of the symptoms that occur in the weeks after the event are quite normal. You start feeling nervous or anxious if you are reminded of what happened.

You may also find yourself avoiding the area where the trauma occurred. You may start to avoid talking about what happened. Many people try to push down memories, thoughts, or images of the event. They can intrude into your mind, often when you least expect them. Many also report sleep trouble and nightmares. You may have increased irritability, feel angry or "on edge," or feel more sad than normal.

It may be hard to engage in your normal daily activities during this time. You may have trouble going to work, school, or spending time with people you care about. These symptoms are known as "acute stress symptoms" because they occur soon after the traumatic event. For most people, they lessen over time.

For others, these symptoms may not go away as easily. You may want to talk with a mental health provider if your symptoms haven't improved after one month and/or if they interfere with your daily life. This does not mean you are weak or that you aren't able to cope.

How to Find a Mental Health Care Provider

1. Contact your insurance company to ask for a list of mental health care providers covered by your insurance.
2. Ask your PCP (primary care provider) or a provider you trust to recommend mental health care providers in your community.
3. Look on psychologytoday.com or locator.apa.org. You can filter by a few options such as insurance, provider's gender, what you want to focus on, etc.

Choosing a Mental Health Care Provider

- **Specialization:** You may want to look for a provider who specializes in the treatment of trauma, pain, anxiety/depression, and/or coping with health issues.
- **Distance from your home, or availability of telehealth services.**
- **Cost:** Many mental health providers accept insurance, but some do **not**. Ask if your insurance will cover all or some of the cost of treatment. Some providers also charge on a sliding scale. This means that the cost of the therapy is based on what you can afford.
- **Availability:** When is the provider's next open appointment, or do they have a waiting list? It may take a few phone calls to find someone who has open appointments.

Remember that the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** is always available if you are having thoughts of harming yourself or if you are in need of emotional support. The Lifeline network is available 24/7 across the United States. You can reach them by calling **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 4/2024. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#8145.