

## ADVICE ON POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

### What is PTSD?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) develops following a stressful event or situation of an exceptionally threatening or catastrophic nature, which is likely to cause pervasive distress in almost anyone. PTSD does not therefore develop following those upsetting situations that are described as 'traumatic' in everyday language, for example, divorce, loss of job, or failing an exam. PTSD is a disorder that can affect people of all ages. Around 25–30% of people experiencing a traumatic event may go on to develop PTSD.

Symptoms of PTSD often develop immediately after the traumatic event but in some (less than 15% of all sufferers) the onset of symptoms may be delayed.

### What are the symptoms of PTSD?

The most characteristic symptoms of PTSD are ***re-experiencing symptoms***. PTSD sufferers involuntarily re-experience aspects of the traumatic event in a very vivid and distressing way. This includes flashbacks where the person acts or feels as if the event was recurring; nightmares; and repetitive and distressing intrusive images or other sensory impressions from the event. Reminders of the traumatic event arouse intense distress and/or physiological reactions.

***Avoidance of reminders of the trauma*** is another core symptom of PTSD. This includes people, situations or circumstances resembling or associated with the event. People with PTSD often try to push memories of the event out of their mind and avoid thinking or talking about it in detail, particularly about its worst moments. On the other hand, many ruminate excessively about questions that prevent them from coming to terms with the event (for example, about why the event happened to them, about how it could have been prevented, or about how they could take revenge).

PTSD sufferers also experience symptoms of ***hyperarousal*** including hypervigilance for threat, exaggerated startle responses, irritability and difficulty concentrating, and sleep problems.

Others with PTSD also describe symptoms of ***emotional numbing***. These include lack of ability to experience feelings, feeling detached from other people, giving up previously significant activities, and amnesia for significant parts of the event.

## **Can PTSD be treated?**

PTSD sufferers may not present for treatment for months or years after the onset of symptoms despite the considerable distress experienced, but PTSD is a treatable disorder even when problems present many years after the traumatic event.

## **If you have any concerns please contact your local GP**

This guidance is based on the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) publication *Clinical Guideline 26: Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): the management of PTSD in adults and children in primary and secondary care*