

Treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder

Almost everyone who goes through a traumatic event will be emotionally affected in some way. For some, the effects can be long lasting. If you are still experiencing problems two weeks after a traumatic event, it is worth talking to your GP or a mental health professional to assess how you are going and to see if treatment would be helpful.

Effective treatments for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are available, and include counselling, medication, or a combination of both. These treatments can work even if your traumatic experience was a long time ago.

If you need help, please see www.phoenixaustralia.org to find out about available services.

For immediate assistance call Lifeline on 13 11 14 for confidential 24 hour counselling and referrals.

Counselling

It is generally best to start with counselling rather than use medication as the first and only solution to the problem.

Recommended counselling approaches for PTSD include trauma-focussed cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR). Both these approaches will help you learn:

- ways to confront and come to terms with painful memories, thoughts and images so you don't feel as distressed by them
- strategies to help you get back into activities or visit places that you have avoided since the trauma because they have been too distressing
- tools to help you relax when you start getting too anxious or wound up
- to explore thoughts that may make your memories of the event more painful.

Counselling can involve around 8 to 12 sessions, though in some cases it might take longer.

Medication

The medications usually used to treat PTSD are antidepressants. Even if you don't have depression, antidepressants can help make feelings associated with trauma more manageable. There are different kinds of antidepressants, but research has shown that selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are more likely to help.

Treatment for children and adolescents with PTSD

For children and adolescents who are struggling to recover after a traumatic event, the recommended treatment is trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). This treatment will be adjusted to suit the child's developmental stage, and involves the following:

- learning about the type of traumatic event experienced (e.g., how common it is), and common reactions to trauma
- teaching children to relax and manage anxiety
- helping children to create a coherent story of the traumatic event, and correct any unhelpful beliefs about the event (e.g., self-blame)
- gradual exposure to trauma-related objects or situations that are feared or avoided
- helping children to get back into everyday activities
- supporting families.

For more information

- Download a copy of *Recovery after Trauma – A Guide for People with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder* from www.phoenixaustralia.org.
- Visit www.phoenixaustralia.org for a list of relevant services.
- Talk to your GP.
- For immediate assistance call Lifeline on 13 11 14.