

Post-traumatic stress tip sheet

What is post-traumatic stress?

It is common to feel fear, distress and anxiety after a traumatic event, such as a serious accident, assault, natural disaster or the sudden death of a loved one. For many people these reactions ease over time. For some people, strong reactions continue and affect everyday life. Post-traumatic stress is a common experience in Australia, and effective support is available.

Common signs

Reactions after trauma can include:

- Unwanted memories, flashbacks or nightmares
- Strong distress when reminded of the event
- Avoiding people, places or thoughts linked to it
- Feeling fear, anger, guilt or numbness
- Feeling constantly on alert for danger
- Being easily startled
- Trouble sleeping or concentrating
- Taking more risks than usual

Things that may help

Some people find these ideas helpful in the weeks after a traumatic event and alongside professional support.

Allowing feelings

Going through something very hard can bring many feelings. It is okay to feel how you feel.

Remembering strengths

Some people find it helps to think about ways they have coped with difficult times before, and the people and things that helped.

Rest and the body

Rest, nourishing meals and gentle activity may help, even when sleep is hard. Physical and mental health are linked.

A simple routine

Some people find a simple routine with one enjoyable or meaningful activity each day helpful.

Small decisions

Some people find it helpful to put big life decisions on hold for a while, and to make small everyday choices that bring back a sense of control.

Staying connected

Time with people you trust can help. There is no need to talk about what happened unless you want to.

Things that **may help** (continued)

Alcohol and drugs

Alcohol and drugs may numb painful feelings in the short term, but can get in the way of recovery.

Support from others

Family and friends can make a real difference after trauma. Some people find it helps to let others know what is helpful.

When to get **more support**

If things are becoming unmanageable and affecting your social, family, work or study life, you may want to see your GP or a psychologist. You do not need to wait until things feel serious to reach out.

If difficulties continue in the weeks after a traumatic event, a GP can be a good place to start, and can talk with you about seeing a psychologist experienced in trauma. Trauma focused psychological therapies are among the evidence based approaches for post-traumatic stress.

Benefits of **seeking support**

- Talking with a GP or psychologist may help you make sense of what is happening.
- Support might help you feel less alone with what you are going through.
- A psychologist could offer new ways of coping that suit you.
- Talking with someone experienced in trauma may help, at a pace that feels right for you.

Need help **right now?**

If you or someone else is in danger or thinking about suicide, please reach out now.

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Emergency services, if life is in danger

13 11 14

Lifeline crisis support, 24 hours, 7 days

13 92 76

13YARN, run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 24/7

Trusted **Australian resources**

Phoenix Australia phoenixaustralia.org

healthdirect healthdirect.gov.au | 1800 022 222

Open Arms (veterans and families) openarms.gov.au | 1800 011 046

This tip sheet offers general information only and does not replace advice from your GP, psychologist or other health professional.