

# PTSD Signs and Symptoms

[By Mayo Clinic Staff](#)

Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms may start within three months of a traumatic event, but sometimes symptoms may not appear until years after the event. These symptoms cause significant problems in social or work situations and in relationships.

PTSD symptoms are generally grouped into four types: intrusive memories, avoidance, negative changes in thinking and mood, or changes in emotional reactions.

## **Intrusive memories**

Symptoms of intrusive memories may include:

- Recurrent, unwanted distressing memories of the traumatic event
- Reliving the traumatic event as if it were happening again (flashbacks)
- Upsetting dreams about the traumatic event
- Severe emotional distress or physical reactions to something that reminds you of the event

## **Avoidance**

Symptoms of avoidance may include:

- Trying to avoid thinking or talking about the traumatic event
- Avoiding places, activities or people that remind you of the traumatic event

## **Negative changes in thinking and mood**

Symptoms of negative changes in thinking and mood may include:

- Negative feelings about yourself or other people
- Inability to experience positive emotions
- Feeling emotionally numb
- Lack of interest in activities you once enjoyed
- Hopelessness about the future
- Memory problems, including not remembering important aspects of the traumatic event
- Difficulty maintaining close relationships

## **Changes in emotional reactions**

Symptoms of changes in emotional reactions (also called arousal symptoms) may include:

- Irritability, angry outbursts or aggressive behavior
- Always being on guard for danger
- Overwhelming guilt or shame
- Self-destructive behavior, such as drinking too much or driving too fast
- Trouble concentrating
- Trouble sleeping
- Being easily startled or frightened

## **Intensity of symptoms**

PTSD symptoms can vary in intensity over time. You may have more PTSD symptoms when you're stressed in general, or when you run into reminders of what you went through. For example, you may hear a car backfire and relive combat experiences. Or you may see a report on the news about a sexual assault and feel overcome by memories of your own assault.

## **When to see a doctor**

If you have disturbing thoughts and feelings about a traumatic event for more than a month, if they're severe, or if you feel you're having trouble getting your life back under control, talk to your health care professional. Get treatment as soon as possible to help prevent PTSD symptoms from getting worse.

## **If you have suicidal thoughts**

If you or someone you know is having suicidal thoughts, get help right away through one or more of these resources:

- Reach out to a close friend or loved one.
- Contact a minister, a spiritual leader or someone in your faith community.
- Call a suicide hotline number
- Make an appointment with your doctor, mental health provider or other health care professional.

## **When to get emergency help**

If you think you may hurt yourself or attempt suicide, call 911 or your local emergency number immediately.

If you know someone who's in danger of committing suicide or has made a suicide attempt, make sure someone stays with that person. Call 911 or your local emergency number immediately. Or, if you can do so safely, take the person to the nearest hospital emergency room.

