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# Overview - Post-traumatic stress disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition caused by very stressful, frightening or distressing events.

## Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Someone with PTSD often relives the traumatic event through nightmares and flashbacks, and may experience feelings of isolation, irritability and guilt.

They may also have problems sleeping, such as [insomnia](#), and find concentrating difficult.

These symptoms are often severe and persistent enough to have a significant impact on the person's day-to-day life.

## Causes of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Any situation that a person finds traumatic can cause PTSD.

These can include:

- serious road accidents
- violent personal assaults, such as sexual assault, mugging or robbery
- serious health problems
- childbirth experiences

PTSD can develop immediately after someone experiences a disturbing event, or it can occur weeks, months or even years later.

PTSD is estimated to affect about 1 in every 3 people who have a traumatic experience, but it's not clear exactly why some people develop the condition and others do not.

## **Complex post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**

People who repeatedly experience traumatic situations, such as severe neglect, abuse or violence, may be diagnosed with complex PTSD.

Complex PTSD can cause similar symptoms to PTSD and may not develop until years after the event.

It's often more severe if the trauma was experienced early in life, as this can affect a child's development.

[Find out more about complex PTSD](#)

## **When to get medical advice**

It's normal to experience upsetting and confusing thoughts after a traumatic event, but most people

improve naturally over a few weeks.

You should see a GP if you or your child are still having problems about 4 weeks after the traumatic experience, or if the symptoms are particularly troublesome.

If necessary, your GP can refer you to mental health specialists for further assessment and treatment.

## How post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is treated

PTSD can be successfully treated, even when it develops many years after a traumatic event.

Treatment depends on the severity of symptoms and how soon they occur after the traumatic event.

Any of the following treatment options may be recommended:

- watchful waiting – monitoring your symptoms to see whether they improve or get worse without treatment
- [antidepressants](#) – such as [paroxetine](#) or [sertraline](#)
- [talking therapies](#) – such as trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) or eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR)

You can refer yourself directly to a talking therapies service.

 [Find a talking therapies service](#)

### Social care and support guide

You can get support if:

- you need help with day-to-day living because of illness or disability
- you care for someone regularly because they're ill or disabled or because of their age, including family members

[Find out more about social care and support](#)

## More in [Post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#)

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