

# Have you lived through a scary and dangerous event?

A REAL ILLNESS

Post-Traumatic  
Stress Disorder (PTSD)



US DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

**NIMH**  
National Institute  
of Mental Health

## Does This Sound Like You?

Have you lived through a scary and dangerous event?

Please put a check in the box next to any problems you have.

- Sometimes, all of a sudden, I feel like the event is happening over again. I never know when this will occur.
- I have nightmares and bad memories of the terrifying event.
- I stay away from places that remind me of the event.
- I jump and feel very upset when something happens without warning.
- I have a hard time trusting or feeling close to other people.
- I get mad very easily.
- I feel guilty because others died and I lived.
- I have trouble sleeping and my muscles are tense.

If you put a check in the box next to some of these problems, you may have **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**.

PTSD is a  
**real** illness that  
needs to be treated.

Many people who have been through a  
frightening experience have this illness.  
It's not your fault and you don't have to suffer.

Read this booklet and learn how to get help.  
You **can** feel better and get your life back!

# 1. What is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

PTSD is a real illness. People may get PTSD after living through a disturbing or frightening experience. It can be treated with medicine and therapy.

You can get PTSD after you have been:

- Raped or sexually abused
- Hit or harmed by someone in your family
- A victim of a violent crime
- In an airplane or car crash
- In a hurricane, tornado, or fire
- In a war
- In an event where you thought you might be killed, or
- After you have seen any of these events

If you have PTSD, you often have nightmares or scary thoughts about the experience you went through. You try to stay away from anything that reminds you of your experience.

You may feel angry and unable to trust or care about other people. You may always be on the lookout for danger. You can feel very upset when something happens suddenly or without warning.

## 2. When does PTSD start and how long does it last?

For most people, PTSD starts within about three months of the event. For some people, signs of PTSD don't show up until years later. PTSD can happen to anyone at any age. Even children can have it.

Some people get better within six months, while others may have the illness for much longer.

## 3. Am I the only person with this illness?

No. You are not alone. In any year, 5.2 million Americans have PTSD.

## 4. What can I do to help myself?

- Talk to your doctor about the experience that upset you and your feelings about it. Tell your doctor if you have scary memories, if you feel sad, if you have trouble sleeping, or if you are angry all the time. Tell your doctor if these problems keep you from doing everyday things and living your life. You may want to show your doctor this booklet. It can help explain how you feel. Ask your doctor for a checkup to make sure you don't have some other illness.
- Ask your doctor if he or she has helped people with PTSD. Special training helps doctors treat people with PTSD. If your doctor doesn't have special training, ask for the name of a doctor or counselor who does.
- Get more information. Call 1-866-615-6464 to have free information mailed to you.

You can  
feel  
better.

## 5. What can a doctor or counselor do to help me?

- A doctor may give you medicine to help you feel less afraid and tense. It may take a few weeks for the medicine to work.
- Talking to a specially trained doctor or counselor, or with other people who went through experiences like yours, helps many people with PTSD. This is called “therapy.” Therapy can help you work through your terrible experience.



# Here is one person's story:

"After I was attacked, I felt afraid, depressed, and angry all the time. I couldn't sleep or eat much. Even when I tried to stop thinking about it, I still had awful nightmares and memories.



"I was confused and didn't know where to go for help. A friend told me to call the doctor. My doctor helped me find a special doctor who knows about PTSD.



"I had to work hard, but after some helpful medication and therapy, I am starting to feel like myself again. I'm glad I made that first call to my doctor."



# Remember - you can get help now:

- Talk to your doctor about the event and your feelings about it.
- Call 1-866-615-6464. It is a free call.  
You will get free information about PTSD mailed to you.

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is part of the Federal government. NIMH conducts medical research to find new and better ways to prevent and treat mental illnesses. NIMH also provides free information about mental illnesses.

**For more information, contact:**

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1-866-615-NIMH (6464) toll-free  
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TTY: 866-415-8051  
FAX: 301-443-4279  
E-mail: [nimhinfo@nih.gov](mailto:nimhinfo@nih.gov)  
Web site: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

For information on PTSD, go to MedLinePlus®, a service of the U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health at the following web site:  
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/posttraumaticstressdisorder.html>

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