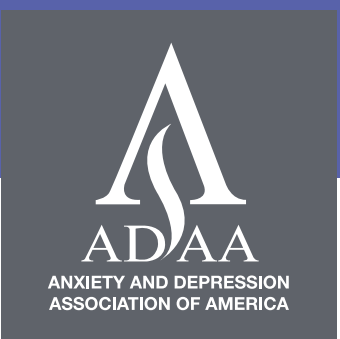


# Posttraumatic Stress Disorder PTSD

PTSD



# Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Many of us have witnessed or experienced a serious illness, an accident, a personal assault, or other traumatic events. With time the grief typically passes, the pain lessens, and life eventually gets back to normal.

Most people recover from traumatic events, but some experience severe distress, anxiety, and depression for months or even years. They frequently re-experience the event through intrusive thoughts, upsetting reminders, or nightmares; relaxing, concentrating, or sleeping become difficult. They often feel detached or estranged from loved ones. These are symptoms of **posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD**.

**PTSD is a serious, potentially debilitating condition** that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a life-threatening event, such as a natural disaster, serious accident, terrorist incident, sudden death of a loved one; war; or rape or other violent personal assault.

It is characterized by four main types of symptoms:

1. Re-experiencing a traumatic event through intrusive distressing recollections, flashbacks, and nightmares
2. Emotional numbness and avoidance of places, people, and activities that are reminders of the trauma
3. Feeling cut off from others and other negative alterations in cognitions (ways of thinking, understanding, learning, and remembering) and mood
4. Marked changes in arousal and reactivity, including difficulty sleeping and concentrating, feeling jumpy, easily irritated, and angered

These symptoms usually occur within a few weeks of a trauma, but they may not appear for several months or even years.

## Anxiety and Trauma



Extreme anxiety and trauma-related fear are characteristic of PTSD. The American Psychiatric Association classifies PTSD in a category with other trauma- and stress-related disorders that are closely related to anxiety disorders.

Some people may experience PTSD simultaneously with anxiety disorders, depression, and substance abuse. Women are twice as likely to develop PTSD as men.

The term “anxiety disorders” describes a group of conditions that includes agoraphobia, generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), panic disorder and panic attacks, social anxiety disorder, selective mutism, separation anxiety, and specific phobias.

Anxiety is a normal part of living. It's the body's way of telling us something isn't right. It keeps us from harm's way and prepares us to act quickly in the face of danger. Some people have mild and manageable anxiety. Others, however, experience anxiety that is persistent, irrational, and overwhelming.

While PTSD is classified as a stress-related disorder in the *DSM-5*, it is still characterized by extreme anxiety and trauma-related fear. (*DSM-5* refers to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th edition), the standard classification of mental disorders used by mental health professionals in the United States.) For more information about anxiety disorders, OCD, PTSD, and depression, visit [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org).

traumatic

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

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# Everyday Anxiety and Stress

## vs. PTSD

### EVERYDAY ANXIETY AND STRESS

1. Frightening thoughts and images, difficulty falling asleep or concentrating, feeling agitated for days or a few weeks following a physical assault.
2. Wanting to spend time alone after witnessing the sudden death of a loved one, staying away from reminders of the person, avoiding participation in activities with family or friends immediately afterward.
3. Feeling frightened, angry, or agitated after losing personal possessions during a life-threatening natural disaster, accident, or similar event.

### PTSD

1. Chronic distressing intrusive memories, flashbacks, nightmares, or sudden floods of emotions long after a trauma.
2. Feeling emotionally numb and avoiding situations or activities that are reminders of the trauma, loss of interest in everything, withdrawing from family or friends for months or years.
3. Negative beliefs, guilt and self-blame, and a persistent negative emotional state.
4. Severe and recurrent anger, jumpiness, insomnia, lack of concentration long after witnessing a natural disaster.



## Effects



Mentally reliving a traumatic event can be almost as stressful and frightening to people suffering with PTSD as the original event. In addition to the physical and psychological symptoms, there is often embarrassment, confusion, and frustration. Even though the disorder has very specific symptoms, PTSD is often misunderstood or misdiagnosed. It often places a strain on relationships, as many people will isolate and detach themselves from family, friends, and activities they once enjoyed.

## Causes



Many scientists are studying why some people develop PTSD and others do not. Some are focusing on genes that play a role in creating fear memories, and others are examining parts of the brain involved in dealing with fear and stress.

It appears that the more severe, long-lasting, or dangerous a traumatic event, the more vulnerable a person is to developing PTSD. Experiencing a trauma caused by others, such as rape, war, and assault are also more likely to result in developing PTSD.

Effects  
Causes  
Treatments

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, individual differences in specific genes or brain areas may set the stage for developing PTSD without causing any symptoms. Childhood trauma, head injury, or a history of mental illness, or other environmental factors may increase the risk by affecting a person's early brain growth. Also, personality and cognitive factors, such as optimism and the tendency to view challenges positively or negatively, and the availability and use of social support appear to influence how people adjust to traumatic stresses.



## Suicide

Research shows that both depression and anxiety are risk factors for suicide. More than 90 percent of people who commit suicide have a diagnosable illness. Early diagnosis and intervention with appropriate treatment are critical steps to feeling better.



- ▶ Contact the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention ([www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)) for more information.
- ▶ Call **1-800-273-TALK** (8255) to talk to a skilled, trained counselor at a crisis center in your area at any time (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline).
- ▶ The Veterans Crisis Line provides confidential help for veterans and their families online ([www.veteranscrisisline.net/](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/)) and by phone (**1-800-273-8255**; press 1) and text (838255).

## Treatment

If symptoms lasting beyond a few weeks interfere in daily functioning, seek professional help. Most people who receive treatment for PTSD see significant improvement and enjoy a better quality of life.

A variety of good options for treatment are available, so you can be hopeful that you or a loved one could feel better soon. Effective treatments include cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), such as exposure therapy, cognitive therapy, and anxiety management, as well as the medication class of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs).

Let us help  
[www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)

*Let us help you  
find treatment.*

*A variety of good  
options for treatment  
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A physician must prescribe medications. If you choose this treatment option, you must follow your doctor's prescription. Do not stop taking any medication without discussing it with your physician and be sure to discuss other prescriptions (e.g., antibiotics and birth control) you are taking that could have interactions.

The National Institute of Mental Health includes cognitive-behavioral therapy as an effective treatment option that usually lasts 6 to 12 weeks, although it may take longer. This type of therapy teaches helpful ways to react to frightening events that trigger PTSD symptoms:

- ▶ Educates about trauma and its effects.
- ▶ Uses relaxation and anger control skills.
- ▶ Provides tips for better sleep, diet, and exercise habits.
- ▶ Helps people identify and deal with guilt, shame, and other feelings about a traumatic event.



- ▶ Focuses on changing how people react to PTSD symptoms.

No one treatment for PTSD or related disorders is right for everyone. What works for one person may not be the best choice for someone else. Your course of treatment should be tailored to your individual needs. Ask your doctor to explain why a particular type of treatment is recommended, other available options, and what you must do to fully participate in your recovery.



Find out more about treatments on the ADAA website at [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org).

## Finding Help

Visit ADAA at [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org) to find qualified mental health professionals in the *Find a Therapist* directory.

Suffering from PTSD can interfere with your life. ADAA provides resources that will help you and your loved ones better understand your condition, connect you with a community of people who know what you are experiencing, and help you locate mental health professionals in your area.

Learn about causes, symptoms, and effective treatments for anxiety, trauma- and stress-related disorders, and depression; review questions to ask a therapist or doctor; and find helpful materials, including podcasts and videos to help family members and other loved ones.

ADAA is here to help you make the best decisions so you can move forward with your life.

Learn  
about  
treatments

*Find a Therapist*  
at [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)

# Resources for Veterans

## **Military and Military Families — [www.adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/military-military-families](http://www.adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/military-military-families)**

The ADAA website provides resources and information, including videos and podcasts.

## **United States Department of Veteran Affairs — [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)**

Wide range of benefits, including medical treatment and mental health services

1-800-827-1000 or 1-877-222-VETS

## **National Center for PTSD — [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)**

Educational resources for veterans, health care providers, researchers, and the general public, including handouts, apps, videos, and courses based on current research

## **Vet Center — [www.vetcenter.va.gov](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov)**

Veterans and family members are eligible for readjustment counseling for successful transition from military to civilian life.

1-800-905-4675



## **Women's Trauma Recovery Program (WTRP) — [www.womenvetsptsd.va.gov](http://www.womenvetsptsd.va.gov)**

Residential program treats women veterans, active duty service members, National Guard, and reservists with PTSD.

## **Military Pathways — [www.militarymentalhealth.org](http://www.militarymentalhealth.org)**

Free, anonymous mental health and alcohol self-assessments to military family members, service members, and veterans

## **National Military Family Association — [www.militaryfamily.org](http://www.militaryfamily.org)**

Focus on issues important to military families, including fighting for benefits and programs that strengthen and protect Uniformed Services families.

## **Real Warriors Campaign — [www.realwarriors.net](http://www.realwarriors.net)**

Promotes building resilience, facilitating recovery and supporting reintegration of returning service members, veterans and their families

## **Wounded Warrior Project —**

### **[www.woundedwarriorproject.org](http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org)**

Raise awareness and enlists the public's aid for the needs of injured service members. Helps injured service members aid and assist each other. Provides unique, direct programs and services to meet the needs of injured service members

## **HELP ADAA HELP OTHERS.**

You can make a difference by helping ADAA expand its efforts to reach those with anxiety disorders, depression, OCD, PTSD, and related disorders. Your contribution supports ADAA's efforts to increase awareness and provide education that helps people find treatment. Your donation also supports research and allows ADAA to advocate for improved treatments and access to care.

Donate [online](http://www.adaa.org) at [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org),

on the [phone](tel:240-485-1001) (240-485-1001),

or by [mail](mailto:adaa@adaa.org) to ADAA,  
8701 Georgia Avenue, Suite 412  
Silver Spring, MD 20910.

**All donations are tax-deductible.**

# About ADAA

The Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the prevention, treatment, and cure of anxiety disorders and to improve the lives of all people who suffer from them.

**Help ADAA help others. Please donate at [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org).**

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For more information visit [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org) or contact

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