

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

You have experienced a traumatic event (an injury, loss of a loved one or property or a serious threat, or any overwhelming emotional experience). Even though the event may be completed, you may now be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic event. Sometimes they may appear a few hours or a few days later. And, in some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks or a few months and occasionally longer depending on the severity of the traumatic event. With understanding and the support of loved ones, the stress reactions usually pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance from a counselor may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates that the particular traumatic event was just too powerful for the person to manage by themselves.

Here are some very common signs and symptoms of a stress reaction in a traumatized person.

Physical

Nausea
Upset stomach
Tremors (lips, hands)
Feeling uncoordinated
Profuse sweating
Chills
Diarrhea
Chest pain (should be checked at hospital)
Rapid heartbeat
Rapid breathing
Increased blood pressure
Headaches
Muscle Aches
Sleep Disturbances

Thinking

Slowed thinking
Difficulty making decisions
Difficulty in problem solving
Confusion
Disorientation (especially to places & time)
Difficulty calculating
Difficulty in concentration
Memory problems
Difficulty in naming common objects and/or persons
Seeing the event over & over
Distressing dreams
Poor attention span

Emotional

Anxiety or Fear
Guilt or Grief
Depression
Sadness
Feeling lost or abandoned
Feeling isolated
Worry about others
Wanting to hide
Wanting to limit contact with others
Anger
Irritability
Feeling numb
Startled
Shocked

HELPFUL HINTS FOR RECOVERY

Trying some of the following hints may help to alleviate the emotional pain associated with a traumatic event. For the next few days anyway you should consider eating and/or drinking less caffeine, salt, sugar, and eating and/or drinking more wholesome foods. Give your body a chance to recover too.

For Yourself

- Try to get more rest.
- Talk to friends.
- Spend time with loved ones.
- Try not to be alone for a while.
- Intrusive thoughts/images are normal. Don't try to fight them, they'll decrease over time and become less painful.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible but take breaks.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).
- Try to keep a reasonable level of activity.
- Fight against boredom – physical activity is helpful.
- Reestablish a normal schedule as soon as possible but don't push too hard.
- Express your feelings as soon as they arise.
- Talk to people that you trust and who love you.
- Listen carefully.

For Family Members and Friends

- Spend time with your loved one.
- Offer your assistance and listen actively, even if they don't ask.
- Reassure them that they are safe.
- Help them with everyday tasks.
- Give them some private time but check on them occasionally.
- Don't take anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell them they are "lucky it wasn't worse." They are not consoled by this statement. Instead, tell them you are sorry this happened and that you want to help.
- Don't be surprised if your loved one only wants to talk about the incident with friends, colleagues or others affected by the incident.