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Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

The terrorist attacks in New York, Washington and Pittsburgh have had a tremendous effect on all Americans across the country. Most people who are exposed to a terrifying event have symptoms of severe stress in the days and weeks following the event, but the symptoms usually decrease over time and then disappear. However, some will go on to develop PTSD. PTSD is a real illness that needs to be treated. People may get PTSD after living through this, or other terrible experiences.

Symptoms

- Feeling like the terrible event is happening all over again - this feeling often comes without warning
- Having nightmares and scary thoughts about the terrifying event
- Staying away from anything that reminds you of the event
- Feeling jumpy and very upset when something happens without warning
- Having a hard time trusting or feeling close to other people
- Feeling guilty because others died and you lived
- Having trouble sleeping, muscles are tense
- Feeling angry and unable to care about or trust other people
- Being on the lookout for danger

Facts

- For most people, PTSD starts at least one month after the terrible event. For some people, signs of PTSD don't show up until years later.
- PTSD can happen to anyone at any age. Children can have PTSD.
- It's not your fault and you don't have to suffer.
- With treatment, some people get better within six months, while others may have the illness much longer.
- You're not alone. In any year, 5.2 million Americans have PTSD.
- Having PTSD is not a sign of weakness.

What you can do to help yourself

- Understanding what you're feeling and taking positive steps can help you cope. Talk to a professional. Treatment will help.
- Stop drinking or using drugs. This is a common way to cope with upsetting trauma symptoms, but it actually leads to more problems.

Treatments

A combination of treatments is usually recommended.

- A doctor may give you medicine to help you feel less afraid and tense and help you sleep better.
- Working with a therapist helps many people with PTSD.

References and for more information:

National Institute of Mental Health www.nimh.nih.gov The National Mental Health Association www.nmha.org
National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder www.ncptsd.org American Psychological Association www.apa.org
The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies www.istss.org American Psychiatric Association www.psych.org



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