

Common Reactions to Trauma

When you experience a traumatic or frightening event it is normal to have strong physical and emotional reactions that remain after the traumatic event is over. These reactions may last for a few days, weeks or even longer.

How you react will depend on many things including; the severity and circumstances of the traumatic event, your personality, other stressors in your life and supports available to you.

Listed below are common reactions that people experience following a traumatic event. You may relate to some or many of these examples.

Physical reactions

Fatigue/exhaustion
Disturbed sleep
Nausea
Nightmares
Restlessness
Headaches
Excessive alertness and being easily startled

Mental reactions

Intrusive thoughts
Confusion
Reduced concentration and memory
Flashbacks or replaying parts of the event
Disorientation

Emotional reactions

Fear
Numbness and detachment
Avoidance
Depression
Guilt
Over-sensitivity
Anxiety and panic
Withdrawal and tearfulness

Behavioural reactions

Avoiding reminders of the event
Inability to stop focusing on it
Getting immersed in work for recovery
Losing touch with normal routines
A sense of losing time
Changed appetite, such as eating more or less
Difficulty doing anything expect familiar routines

Recovering from Trauma*

- Recognize that you have been through a distressing or frightening experience and that you will have a reaction to it.
- Accept that you will not feel your normal self for a period of time, but that it will also eventually pass.
- Remind yourself daily that you are managing – try not to get angry or frustrated with yourself if you are not able to do things as well or efficiently as normal.
- Don't overuse alcohol or drugs to help you cope.
- Avoid making major decisions or big life changes until you feel better.
- Gradually confront what has happened – don't try to block it out.
- Don't bottle up your feelings – talk to someone who can support and understand you.

- Try to keep to your normal routine and stay busy.
- Don't go out of your way to avoid certain places or activities. Don't let the trauma confine your life, but take your time to get back to normal.
- When you feel exhausted, make sure you set aside time to rest.
- Make time for regular exercise – it helps cleanse your body and mind of tension.
- Help your family and friends to help you by telling them what you need, such as time out or someone to talk to.
- Relax – use relaxation techniques such as yoga, breathing or meditation, or do things you enjoy, such as listening to music or gardening.
- Express your feelings as they arise – talk to someone about your feelings or write them down.
- When the trauma brings up memories or feelings, try to confront them. Think about them, then put them aside. If it brings up other past memories, try to keep them separate from the current problem and deal with them separately.

* <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/trauma-reaction-and-recovery>

Where and when to get help

If you are finding these symptoms distressing or they persist after 3 weeks, we encourage you to seek help from the following people:

- Your doctor
- Your local community health centre
- Counsellor
- Psychologist
- Lifeline 13 11 14

**If you have any questions call Psych Perceptions on
02 9186 2544**