

What are Common Reactions to Trauma?



All kinds of trauma survivors commonly experience stress reactions. This is true for veterans, children, and disaster rescue or relief workers. If you understand what is happening when you or someone you know reacts to a traumatic event, you may be less fearful and better able to handle things.

Reactions to a trauma may include:

- Feeling hopeless about the future
- Feeling detached or unconcerned about others
- Having trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Feeling jumpy and getting startled easily at sudden noises
- Feeling on guard and constantly alert
- Having disturbing dreams, memories, or flashbacks
- Having work or school problems
- Blaming yourself
- Being withdrawn or feeling rejected or abandoned
- Recognize that although you might have these feelings over a long period, they will likely be less and less intense over time.
- Make sure to exercise and eat healthy meals
- Do the things that you used to enjoy doing, even if you don't always feel like it. This will help you get back into your routine
- Allow yourself to feel joy at times and to cry when you need.
- Become more socially active

You may also experience more physical reactions such as:

- Upset stomach and trouble eating
- Trouble sleeping and feeling very tired
- Pounding heart, rapid breathing, or feeling edgy
- Sweating
- Severe headache if thinking of the event
- Failure to engage in exercise, diet, safe sex, or regular health care
- Excess smoking, alcohol, drugs, or food consumption

You may have more emotional troubles such as:

- Feeling nervous, helpless, fearful, or sad
- Feeling shocked, numb, and not able to feel love or joy
- Avoiding people, places, and things related to the event
- Being irritable or having outbursts of anger
- Becoming easily upset or agitated

Right after a trauma, almost every survivor will find themselves unable to stop thinking about what happened. Stress reactions such as increased fear, nervousness, jumpiness, upsetting memories, and efforts to avoid reminders will gradually decrease over time for most people. Use your personal support systems, family, and friends when you are ready to talk. Recovery is an ongoing, gradual process. It doesn't happen through suddenly being "cured," and it doesn't mean that you will forget what happened. Most people will recover from trauma naturally over time. If your emotional reactions are getting in the way of your relationships, work, or other important activities, you may want to talk to a counselor or your doctor.