

Trauma

Trauma is an emotional response to an event that threatens your life or safety, or the life or safety of people around you.

A traumatic event can include violence, grief and loss, an accident, persecution, human rights violations and forced displacement. Forced displacement typically features extreme hardship, insecurity and prolonged uncertainty, often in the context of war or civil conflict.

Trauma can also be experienced a result of repeated traumatic events over time such as abuse, neglect or violence.

Trauma might be very different to anything you have experienced before and it can be hard to make sense of it. Experiencing trauma might leave you with many questions about your safety and control over your life. It can be especially difficult to deal with these feelings if you are also dealing with other changes in your life, like moving to new country, trying to find housing or work, or adjusting to a new culture. Everyone has different experiences and reactions to significant events and what is traumatic for one person may not be for another. It is important to not compare your experience to someone else's.

Experiencing trauma is a normal response after a significant event. It is different to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is a longer-lasting condition that requires a formal diagnosis and professional help. More information about PTSD is available in the PTSD Factsheet.

Sometimes PTSD, depression or anxiety can develop after experiencing a trauma. It is important to monitor and be aware of your feelings and what you experience the weeks after a trauma. If you experience symptoms that are impacting your daily life and preventing you from going to work, school or stopping you from your normal activities, or you have any concerns, please see your doctor. More information on depression and anxiety is available in the depression and anxiety fact sheets.

Effects of Trauma

After a traumatic event, it is normal to feel strong emotions and feelings. These can include:

- Emotional numbness
- Detachment from what happened, other people, and yourself
- Shock and disbelief that the event has happened
- Fear of death or injury, being alone, not being able to cope, or of the event happening again
- Helplessness
- Guilt or shame for not having stopped the event, or for being better off than others, or for not reacting better or coping well enough
- Sadness for things that have gone or been lost
- Isolation – feeling that no-one understands or can help
- Elation – joy at being alive and safe
- Anger and frustration about the event, or the unfairness of it.

Other common experiences include:

- Problems keeping up with normal daily activities
- Risk-taking, including increased use of alcohol and other drugs
- Avoiding situations that remind you of past trauma
- Trouble sleeping
- Nightmares
- Re-experiencing the event through dreams, flashbacks or thoughts
- Headaches
- Changes in appetite and weight
- A racing heart
- Shaking or sweating
- Difficulty concentrating
- Emotional changes, like mood swings, anxiety, or a quick temper
- Changes in relationships – some people might seem unsupportive or unavailable, while others might seem closer than before
- Difficulty with school or work



- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Being overly alert or watchful

Look after yourself

Experiencing a traumatic event is unsettling and confusing. It is important to do things to look after yourself. This can include:

- When you are ready, talking to people about your experiences and trying to understand what it was like for other people too
- Deciding what media coverage you can cope with; avoid watching or reading about topics you find upsetting
- Getting support from people you trust, including your friends and family by letting them know how you are feeling
- Getting into routines, like working, attending school, joining a sports group and other activities
- Making time for exercise and rest, and for activities that you enjoy.

When to get help

It is important to get help and see a doctor if you are experiencing any of the effects of trauma that:

- Are getting worse
- Are interfering with school, work, your relationships or activities that you enjoy
- Are distressing or upsetting
- Make you think of harming yourself or someone else.

About this factsheet:

This information is not medical advice. It is generic and does not take into account your personal circumstances, physical wellbeing, mental status or mental health requirements. Do not use this information to treat or diagnose your own, or another person's medical condition and never ignore medical advice or delay seeking it because of something in this information. Any medical questions should be referred to a qualified healthcare professional. If in doubt, please always seek medical advice.

This factsheet has been adapted from information published by [headspace](#). The original information can be viewed at:

<https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/Trauma-web.pdf>

If the symptoms of trauma worsen over time and have a significant impact on your life, it is important to get help early and see a doctor to lessen the impact of mental health issues on your life and improve the chances of recovering fully.

Your doctor is a good place to start when seeking mental health help. The factsheet in this series Getting Professional Mental Health Help has more information on seeking professional help.

If you don't feel comfortable talking with your doctor about your mental health, you can look for another one that you are comfortable with. It may take some time to find the right doctor for you

You can also contact The Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT). FASST is a network of Australia's eight specialist rehabilitation agencies that work with survivors of torture and trauma who have come to Australia from overseas. There is one FASSTT member agency in each state and territory of Australia.

Visit <https://www.fasstt.org.au/> for more information.

If you need help now

If you think someone could hurt themselves or others, get urgent help.

Call emergency services

Dial triple zero (000)

Call Lifeline

Dial 13 11 14

Other sources include:

Black Dog Institute.

https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/post-traumatic-stress-order/?gclid=EAlaIqobChMI797Y0reS7gIVS6aWCh38SgySEAAAYASAAEgKxzfD_BwE

The Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma - FASSTT

This fact sheet has been informed by members of the Embrace Multicultural Mental Health's CALD Mental Health Consumer and Carer group.

Factsheet produced by:

Embrace Multicultural Mental Health

Mental Health Australia

9-11 Napier Close

Deakin, ACT 2600

T +61 2 6285 3100

E multicultural@mhaustralia.org

embracementalhealth.org.au

