

Understanding PTSD



If you've suffered a trauma, you could be at risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). There are many myths surrounding PTSD, which is one reason it's often missed or mistaken for something else. But knowing facts can be empowering. Like the fact that help is out there, and PTSD treatments are available. Learning more about PTSD symptoms may help you have better talks with your healthcare provider and find a next step that might be right for you.

That's why the Anxiety and Depression Association of America and Otsuka America Pharmaceutical, Inc., partnered together to create this brochure: to share information and tools, provide support, and help reduce the stigma of PTSD in society.

You're not alone.

We're here to help. Keep reading to learn more.

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How to use this brochure

As you're reading, notice if anything feels familiar or sounds like you. If it does, you can use the information to help have a talk with your healthcare provider. Only a healthcare provider can diagnose you.

If you don't recognize yourself in these pages but you have upsetting feelings and thoughts, you should still talk to your healthcare provider. It could be something else. For example, anxiety, depression, and PTSD are all distinct conditions. Again, only a healthcare provider can diagnose you and provide appropriate care. Finding out exactly what you're dealing with is often the first step to feeling better.



Check out the resources

It can be a relief to find people or places who understand what you're going through. You will find support options in our [Additional Resources](#) section. Some of them focus on PTSD, and some are also for other mental health disorders.

Stop and get help if you're in crisis

If you're in crisis or think you may hurt yourself or someone else



Call **988** for the
Suicide and Crisis Lifeline



Call **911** for emergencies or go to your
local emergency room

It's harder to fight



when you don't know
what you're
really up against.

What is PTSD?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a condition that may develop after a person is exposed to a traumatic event(s), such as an unexpected death, sexual violence, domestic violence, child abuse, a life-threatening injury, event (car accident, fire, natural disaster), illness, or medical procedure. This is not a complete list of events; there are more. But no matter how it began, PTSD can disrupt the daily activities and affect the overall well-being for someone experiencing this disorder.

Women are twice as likely to develop PTSD compared to men, and adult women account for more than half of the overall PTSD population in the US. Long thought to be a condition connected to military trauma, the majority of patients with PTSD (more than 80%) are civilians, based on 2018 population estimates.

It's normal to feel distress after trauma

It's normal to feel upset, have vivid memories of the experience, or have trouble sleeping after this kind of event. In the beginning, you may struggle with doing everyday things or withdraw from loved ones. But after a few weeks or months, most people start to feel better.

If it's been more than a month...

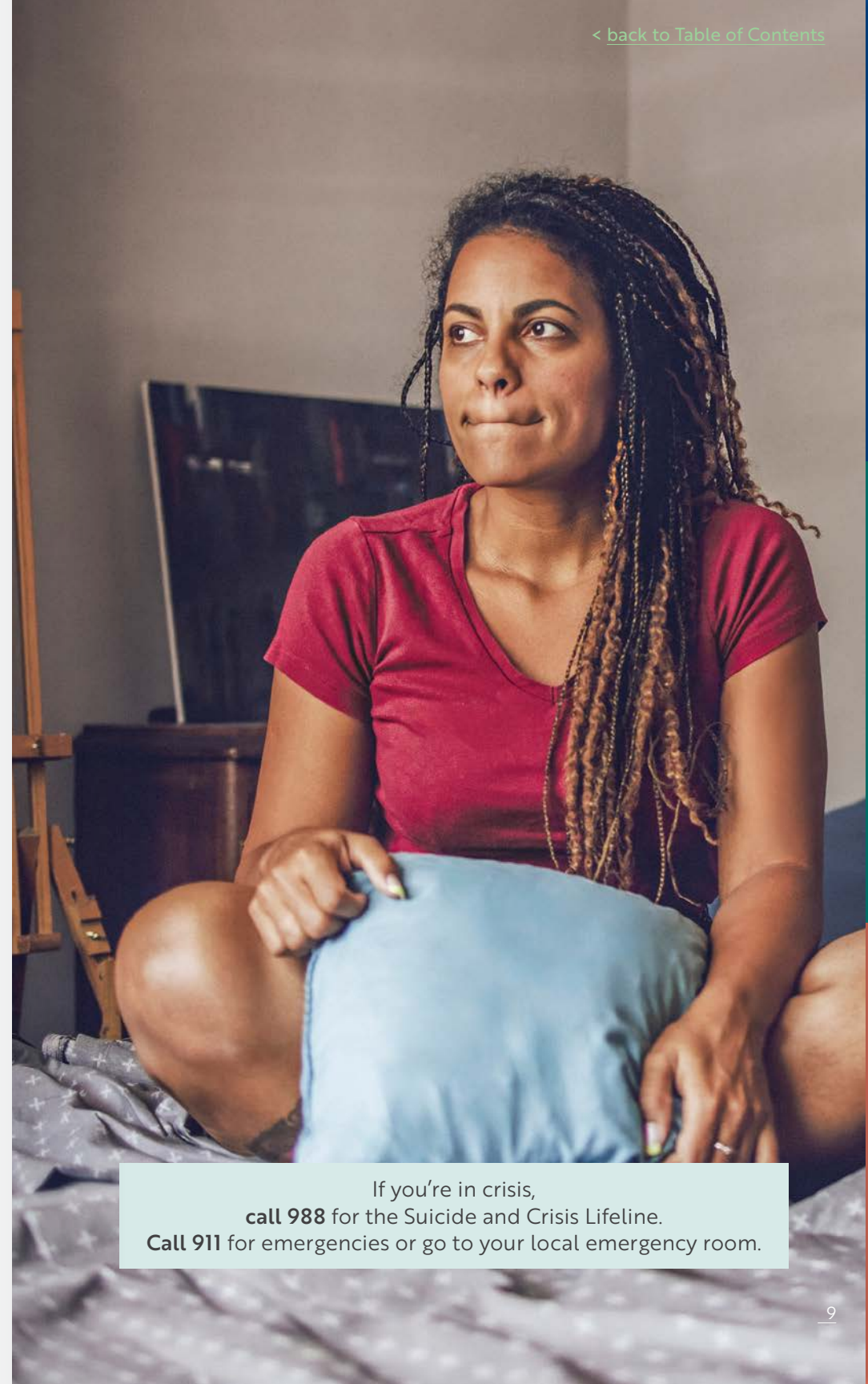
...since the event, and you're still having symptoms, you may have PTSD. But there is hope—even if you've been going through this for years. It's never too late to talk to your healthcare provider and start on the path to healing.

You're not alone

Even though you may feel this way at times. Please know that there are people who know what you're going through and may be able to help. The resources you'll find in this brochure are just some of what's available to you.



[Click here](#) or scan to get additional PTSD information and resources from the Anxiety and Depression Association of America or visit www.adaa.org



If you're in crisis,
call 988 for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.
Call 911 for emergencies or go to your local emergency room.

What can cause PTSD?

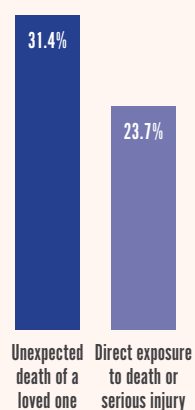
There are many different kinds of trauma that can cause PTSD. Whether you experience it firsthand, you've witnessed the event as a bystander or first responder, or you've learned about it happening to someone you care about, you may be deeply and negatively affected. Below are some of the events that can be traumatic and cause PTSD.

- Sexual assault
- War or combat experience
- Physical assault
- Child abuse
- Unexpected or sudden death of a loved one
- Natural disaster

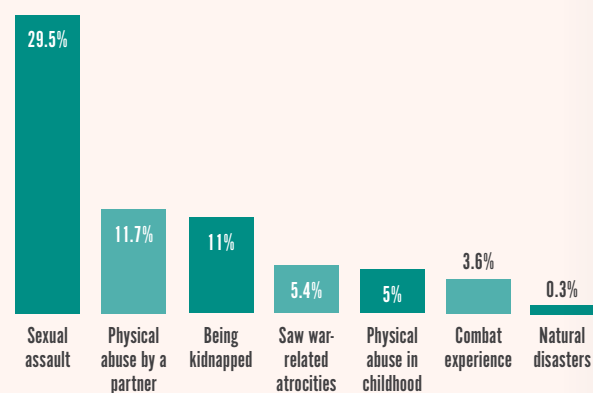
Many different types of traumatic events can lead to PTSD

ACCORDING TO WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO): survey data from 2001-2012

The highest proportion of PTSD cases are due to:



The risk of developing PTSD after trauma exposure (%)



Who gets PTSD?

It's hard to address a problem if you don't even realize that it could happen to you. This is part of why PTSD is underdiagnosed and untreated. You may have heard these common myths, but did you know...

MYTH	DID YOU KNOW?
PTSD is strictly a military condition	<p>Over 80% of people with PTSD have never served in the military</p>
PTSD solely affects men	<p>Over 65% of people with PTSD in the US are adult women</p>
PTSD is rare	<p>As of 2020, ~13 million adults have PTSD. It's one of the most common mental health disorders in the US</p>

Anyone can develop PTSD after experiencing trauma, regardless of their race, economic status, age, or gender. And while the person may be at any stage of life, a national survey reported **the median age of onset of PTSD is 23.**

They may also experience symptoms that are seen in people suffering from anxiety or depression. Because of this, **people with PTSD are 80% more likely to have symptoms of another mental health condition—which is why PTSD may be misdiagnosed.**

Another challenge is that some people don't realize their **symptoms are related to their trauma**—so they don't bring them up to their healthcare provider. And that opportunity to get an accurate diagnosis and care is missed. That's why it is important to share your thoughts and feelings as well as any previous trauma with your healthcare provider.

The 4 core symptom groups of PTSD

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) describes PTSD as having 4 core symptom groups. Although that is only part of the diagnosis. Along with at least 1 traumatic event, it must be clear that these symptoms do not stem from substance abuse or another mental health condition.

Each person's experience will be unique. PTSD symptoms may occur soon after trauma or be delayed. They can be very upsetting, disrupt your daily life, and last more than a month.

1

Reliving the trauma **through intrusive, painful memories, flashbacks,** **or nightmares about the event(s)**

Triggers can be something you feel, see, hear, or even smell.

Vivid memories of the trauma can occur at any time. They can feel real, frightening, and like the event is happening all over again.

Unwelcome memories can be caused by a trigger—something that reminds you of the event. **For example,** seeing a news report about a severe storm or flooding may trigger someone who lived through a hurricane. For another person, firecrackers or loud bangs may trigger memories of a shooting or combat.

2

Avoiding reminders of the event(s) **like people, places, and situations associated with the trauma**

For example, someone who was assaulted on a train may avoid taking mass transit. Or a combat Veteran may avoid crowded places like shopping malls because it feels dangerous to be around so many people.

You may try to stay busy all the time to avoid talking or thinking about the event. You may avoid answering calls or texts and self-isolate for the same reason.

3

Having more negative thoughts and feelings **of fear, anger, guilt, and shame, and negative thinking** **about yourself or others**

You may feel numb and lose interest in doing the things you used to enjoy. **For example,** you may not want to be around friends and family as much. You may find it hard to feel happiness or positive emotions. You may have blank spots in your memory of the traumatic event because your mind is blocking out disturbing information to “protect” you.

You may also experience feelings of guilt or shame about the traumatic event. **For example,** you may feel like there was something you could've done to stop it from happening.

4

Feeling on edge **such as being easily startled, always on alert and on** **the lookout for danger, irritable, or having difficulty** **sleeping and concentrating**

This is called hyperarousal. **For example,** you may feel all wound up—like you can't ever turn off your brain or relax. Family members may tell you they feel like they're “walking on eggshells” to avoid your angry or irritable behavior.

It may cause you to start acting in unhealthy ways and have self-destructive habits (such as smoking, drinking too much, abusing drugs, or driving recklessly).

“The hardest thing about living with undiagnosed PTSD was the idea of knowing something was wrong, but being unable to figure out exactly what it was. I was facing symptoms of PTSD, but I didn't know it was PTSD; I didn't have a diagnosis to put with what I was feeling.

—Patient living with PTSD

A man in a red jacket stands in a lush, green forest, looking up at a large tree trunk. The forest is filled with ferns and moss, creating a dense, vibrant environment.

How PTSD can affect your life

PTSD can make you feel bad on the inside and act differently than you used to on the outside. It negatively impacts many aspects of daily life—at home, at work, and in your community. Here are some of the ways:

Difficulties in relationships

PTSD symptoms can cause problems with trust, closeness, communication, and the feeling of safety and comfort. If you're pulling back from family and friends and having difficulty telling them why, they may start to withdraw, which may make you isolate more. Increasing feelings of hurt and misunderstanding can develop that undermine the support you had before your trauma.

If you have children, you might find yourself feeling more impatient and angry. You may feel like you can't keep them safe, or like you are always losing control.

Problems with sexual intimacy

PTSD makes it difficult to have close relationships. PTSD can interfere with having an active sex life or being able to enjoy intimacy. No matter what kind of trauma was experienced, sexual problems are common in people with PTSD. Those problems can be physical and emotional, such as trouble with erection, orgasm, low levels of desire, and pain during sex.

Trouble at work or school

The workplace or classroom are other areas where PTSD symptoms can get in your way. It can negatively affect the problem-solving and communication skills you need with coworkers, teachers, and peers. You may also have increased absenteeism, anxiety, trouble concentrating, and exhaustion from not sleeping, all of which can lower your job or academic performance.

Don't let PTSD keep disrupting your life and making your world feel smaller. Talk to your healthcare provider to learn about available treatment options that may help you feel better and more like the real you.

Do I have PTSD?

You can start the journey toward learning about a diagnosis and treatment by talking to your healthcare provider. They can help you with next steps and connect you with resources.

You can also use the screening tool below if you think you might have PTSD. Developed by the National Center for PTSD, it can give you an idea if your symptoms may be related to PTSD.

Sometimes things happen to people that are unusually or especially frightening, horrible, or traumatic. For example

- a serious accident or fire
- a war
- a physical or sexual assault or abuse
- seeing someone be killed or seriously injured
- an earthquake or flood
- having a loved one die through homicide or suicide

Have you ever experienced this kind of event?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

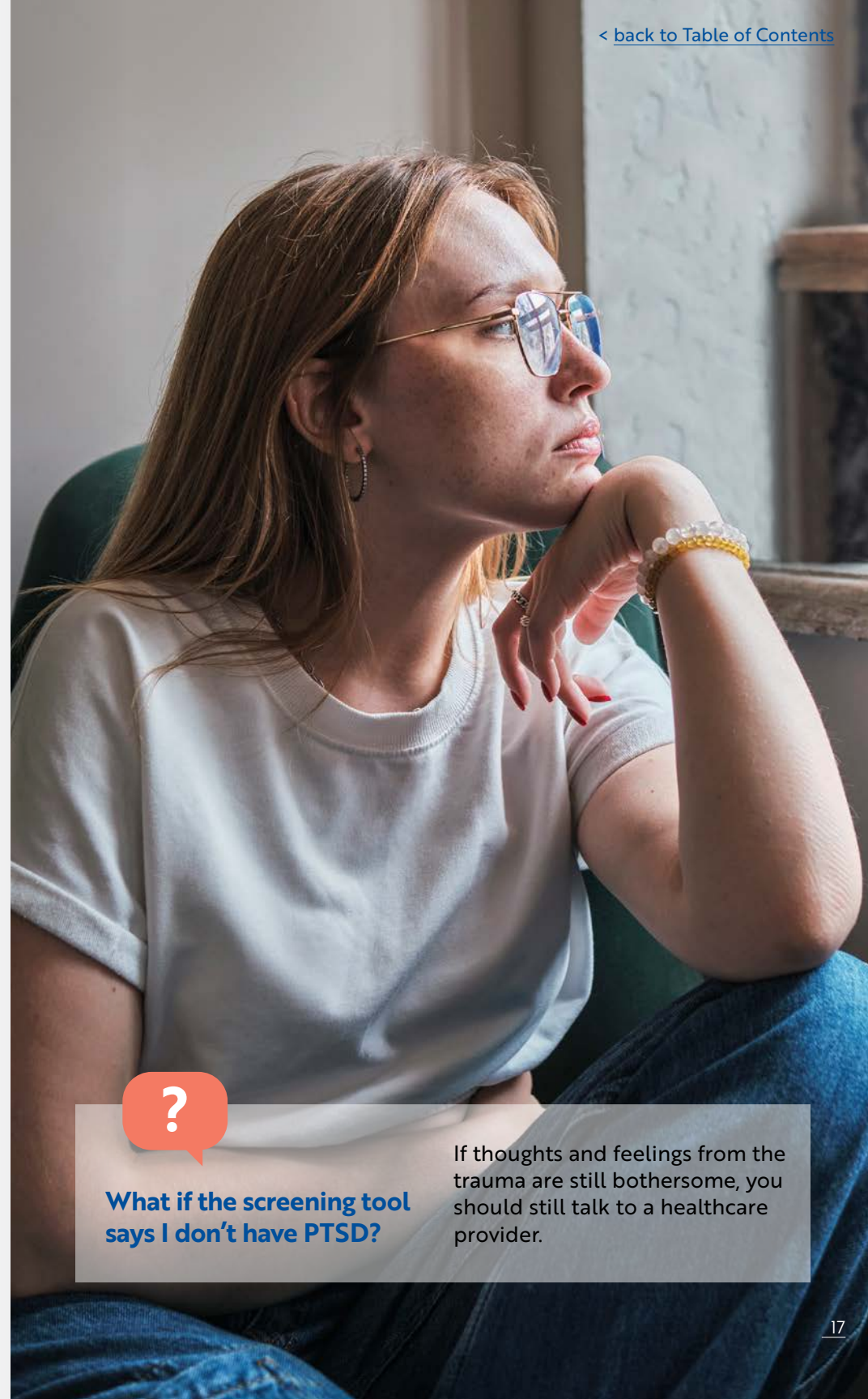
If yes, please answer the questions below.

In the past month, have you

- ☐ Had nightmares about the event(s) or thought about the event(s) when you didn't want to?
- ☐ Tried hard not to think about the event(s) or went out of your way to avoid situations that reminded you of the event(s)?
- ☐ Been constantly on guard, watchful, or easily startled?
- ☐ Felt numb or detached from people, activities, or your surroundings?
- ☐ Felt guilty or unable to stop blaming yourself or others for the event(s) or any problems the event(s) may have caused?

Answering "yes" to 3 or more questions may mean you have PTSD.

Talk to a healthcare provider to learn more about PTSD and to find out for sure if that's what you're going through. Remember, only a healthcare provider can diagnose you.



?

What if the screening tool says I don't have PTSD?

If thoughts and feelings from the trauma are still bothersome, you should still talk to a healthcare provider.



Beginning to heal
can begin with
talking to someone.

Overcoming stigma

There are a lot of myths about PTSD that can lead to stigma. It's important to understand these stigmas and not let them hold you back from getting the help you deserve.

What stigma can look like

People may treat you differently because of your PTSD, or you may feel like they are looking down on you. Even if they mean well, they may be uncomfortable around you. They may not know how to be most helpful or be afraid of saying the wrong thing. This can make it harder to find work, find a place to live, or be a part of your community the way you want to. Stigma can happen because others

- Don't really understand PTSD
- Think PTSD happens only to people in the military
- Don't know that PTSD is an illness that affects many people and can be treated
- Believe that mental health problems are all in your control, "your own fault," or that you can just "get over it"
- Think time heals all wounds. They don't know PTSD is a disease that may need treatment like any other disease.
- Assume PTSD makes you dangerous

You might not want anyone to know that you have PTSD because you may feel guilty, ashamed, or that it's somehow your fault. You may hide it from employers or even close friends and family. If you do, that's called, "self-stigma," and it can be an obstacle to you talking to someone and finding treatment that may help.

QUICK QUESTION

How often have you heard **GET OVER IT?**
___never ___sometimes ___way too often

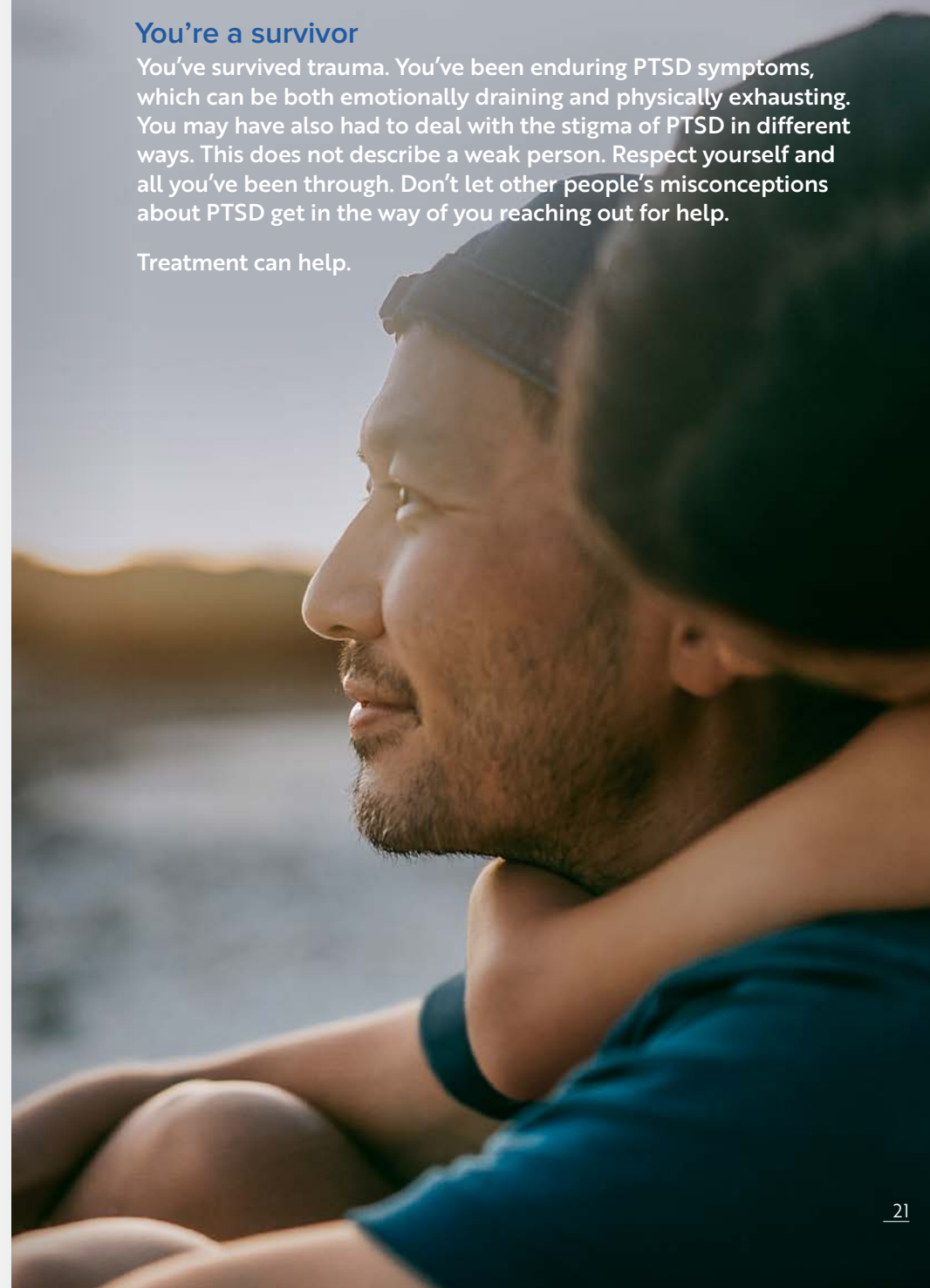
FAST FACT

No one has the right to dismiss your feelings.

You're a survivor

You've survived trauma. You've been enduring PTSD symptoms, which can be both emotionally draining and physically exhausting. You may have also had to deal with the stigma of PTSD in different ways. This does not describe a weak person. Respect yourself and all you've been through. Don't let other people's misconceptions about PTSD get in the way of you reaching out for help.

Treatment can help.



Where to start finding help

You can start with a conversation with your healthcare provider. Tell them about your thoughts, feelings, how you've been behaving, and concerns, and they can help you figure out your best next steps.

You can get help from the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) to find qualified mental health professionals in your area. Visit www.adaa.org and go to the "Find Your Therapist" directory.

Additionally, the ADAA provides resources that can help you and your loved ones better understand your condition and connect you with a community of people who know what you're experiencing.

You can find connection with peer-to-peer counseling. Talking with others who understand trauma and PTSD symptoms themselves can make you realize you're not alone. The sense of belonging and support may help you on the road to feeling better.

Here are some ways you can find peer support:

- The ADAA has an online peer support group for PTSD you can join. It also has a list of mental health support groups across the country. Visit www.adaa.org/find-help to learn more
- Ask your healthcare provider for a recommendation

“
Being told that it's okay to feel how I'm feeling came as a huge surprise to me. All my life I was told to get over things, and treatment was the first time in my life that I was told to not get over things, and instead, to face the things that happened to me.
—Patient living with PTSD
”

You can learn about evidence-based treatments that might be right for you.

On the following pages is information about some of the treatments for PTSD. The good news is that many people have been helped with treatment. You can also gain tools that may help you manage symptoms so they don't stop you from living your life.

You can learn even more about different treatments by using the PTSD decision tool.



PTSD decision aid—an interactive tool that can help you learn about different treatments.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to go to the decision aid

You can read or watch videos about treatments, build a chart that compares them, see what other patients have said, and more. This tool was created by the Veterans Administration (VA), but it is open to everyone.

How is PTSD treated?

Trauma-focused psychotherapies (TFPs) are evidence-based treatments that can help people with PTSD and are the recommended approach. TFPs are talk therapies that help change your relationship with the traumatic event. Each of these methods approaches it differently. And there may be flexibility on how treatment is delivered, meaning how often and for how long, depending on what works best for you.

Of course, if you're still having symptoms after treatment, you and your healthcare provider should talk about managing them in other ways.

QUICK QUESTION

What if you've had **PTSD for years**—could treatment even work by that point?

FAST FACT

No matter how long you've been dealing with PTSD, treatment can help.

You can ask potential therapists if they do these or other TFPs:

Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)

It's very common to have negative thoughts after a traumatic event. You may feel under threat or that the world is unsafe. You may think what happened is your fault. CPT helps you recognize these thought patterns and change them—which can help change how you feel.

Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE)

The idea of PE is to gradually confront things that you have been afraid of or avoiding by talking about them—in a safe, step-by-step way. Exposing yourself to these thoughts and feelings is a way to face these challenges.

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)

EMDR helps you change how you process the upsetting memories and negative reactions your trauma has caused. While talking about the event, your therapist will have you focus on certain sounds or movements. This helps change how you react to memories of your trauma.

Medication

Medications can also help manage PTSD symptoms. Sometimes healthcare providers recommend them in addition to talk therapy. Be sure you understand from your healthcare provider how to take the medication and what you should expect from treatment. Your healthcare provider will monitor how you're doing, help manage any side effects, and make any changes to your treatment plan that are needed.




Treat yourself better

You've been going through a lot, and chances are you're hard on yourself on top of it. So maybe you need to see or hear the words: it's okay to be kinder to yourself. You matter. And there's a world of people dedicated to helping you realize that. Like us. Like everyone you can reach out to in the resources section.

Trauma is difficult enough to go through. But PTSD can cause negative symptoms and consequences that can be hard to see when you're in the middle of them. No wonder feelings of hopelessness and helplessness are not unusual. But the truth is—treatment may help.

Some people think PTSD symptoms will just go away over time, but the chances of that happening are very low. Like many other diseases, PTSD, when left untreated, usually doesn't get better—and it may even get worse.

If you think you might have PTSD, it's important to get help right away. Talk to your healthcare provider about your thoughts and feelings. It's never too soon to start on the path to feeling better.

A young woman with dark, curly hair is shown from the chest up, looking upwards and to the right with a hopeful expression. She is wearing a blue ribbed sweater. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green foliage. The right side of the image transitions into a teal gradient where the text is located.

Managing
PTSD symptoms
may be possible.

Tips on living with PTSD

In addition to therapy and medication, the **National Institute of Mental Health** suggests other ways to help manage your PTSD symptoms. Take a look at this list and see if any of these tips are something you want to do today. Or tomorrow. Remember, it's always a good time to start feeling better.

Set realistic goals for yourself

You don't wake up and suddenly run your first marathon—you start by running a little each day.

Think about what feels right for you and be honest

- Focus on what you can manage
- Break up large tasks into small ones
- Set some priorities and do what you can as you can
- Don't expect your symptoms to improve overnight

Spend time with other people or in places that make you feel at ease

- Identify and seek out comforting situations, places, and people
- Confide in a spouse/partner, trusted friend, or relative
- Tell others about things that may trigger symptoms

Make healthy moves

- Engage in exercise, mindfulness, or other activities that help reduce stress
- Avoid the use of alcohol or drugs

Finding PTSD support

Below are some ways to find support. Please note that the resources listed from the Veterans Administration (VA) are not just for veterans. They're for anyone and everyone who has been touched by PTSD.



Anxiety & Depression Association of America (ADAA)

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code
or call **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

You can learn more about PTSD, treatment options, find a therapist in your area, and read personal stories from people who have struggled, coped, and been helped by treatment for PTSD or other mental health disorders.

To find peer support, go to **[FIND HELP](#)** on the ADAA website.



Online PTSD treatment decision aid

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code

This interactive tool from the VA can help you learn about and compare different treatments. Watch informative videos, find out what other patients think, and more.



PTSD Coach

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code

This app from the VA can help you understand PTSD and how to manage and track symptoms with easy-to-use tools. Find information about evidence-based treatments.



Crisis counselor

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code or call **988**

If you are in distress, you can reach someone right now. Free and confidential support is available 24/7 at the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. On the site, you can read stories of recovery, hope, and more.

What about resources for loved ones?

PTSD also has a way of touching those around you. Family and friends are sometimes the first to notice that something is wrong or that you're pulling away. They may be confused or even feel it is their fault. But just like you, they are not alone.

There are people and places that can help them understand PTSD and how to take positive steps towards your healing and their own. Below are some resources. And remember, those listed from the Veterans Administration (VA) are not just for military families—they're for anyone who needs them.



PTSD Family coach app

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code

Family members can learn about PTSD and how it may affect loved ones. There are tips and tools to help manage stress, create support networks, and better support a loved one with PTSD and themselves.



PTSD Basics

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code

Who gets PTSD? What are the symptoms? Can people with it get better? This page from the National Center for PTSD site covers the basics with links for learning more.



Child Traumatic Stress Network

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code or call **1-888-823-7458**

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network offers information and resources to help better care for children and families who experience or witness traumatic events.





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