

**Did you come from  
a country affected by  
war, political conflict  
or disaster?**

**Do you have  
sleep problems  
nightmares  
unwanted memories  
forgetfulness  
relationship problems?**

**Do you feel  
worried  
restless  
guilty  
sad  
tired  
less pleasure  
angry  
fearful?**

**IF YOU SAID YES TO MOST OF THE  
QUESTIONS ON THE FRONT OF THIS  
BROCHURE, YOU MAY HAVE PTSD  
(POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER).**

### **WHAT IS PTSD?**

PTSD is a natural emotional reaction to terrible experiences that involve actual or threatened serious harm to oneself or others. These types of experiences are called “traumatic.” Examples of traumatic events are bombings, rape, torture, death or disappearance of family members or friends, being forced to leave your home or seeing another person harmed or killed. Other examples of traumatic events are hurricanes, floods or earthquakes. Experiencing any of these events can cause PTSD.

Before coming to Canada, some people—particularly those who have come as refugees—may have lived through events like these.

Everyone faces difficult situations. Often we think about them long after the event. But for some people, the thoughts or memories of these horrible events seriously affect their lives, long after any real danger has passed. This is PTSD.

PTSD can affect anybody, including children. PTSD usually appears within three months of the event. But sometimes symptoms may not appear for years.

## SYMPTOMS OF PTSD

### Reliving the horrible experience over and over

- having nightmares that keep coming back
- having unwanted, disturbing memories of the event
- acting or feeling as if the event is happening again
- feeling upset when you are reminded of the event

### Avoiding reminders of the event

- avoiding activities, places or people that remind you of the traumatic experience
- avoiding friends and family

### Losing emotions

- losing interest in activities you used to enjoy
- experiencing difficulty having loving feelings
- losing ability to feel pleasure

### Always feeling that something bad is about to happen

- constantly worrying
- having a hard time concentrating
- getting angry easily
- having trouble falling or staying asleep
- fearing that someone will harm you
- having sudden attacks of dizziness, fast heartbeat or shortness of breath
- having fears of dying

## DO PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT CULTURES AND AGES HAVE THE SAME PTSD SYMPTOMS?

The symptoms of PTSD are the same in all cultures. But how these symptoms are described and expressed can change from culture to culture. Children and adults may not show the same signs of PTSD. Children respond differently to traumatic events, depending on their understanding and age.

## WHY DO BAD MEMORIES KEEP COMING BACK?

Due to the extreme stress connected with a traumatic event and the memories of the event, the mind tries to defend itself by pushing thoughts and feelings deep inside. While bad memories may go away for a time, the

mind still needs to deal with the feelings. If they are not dealt with, the feelings come back as other physical and emotional problems.

## WHY DO I ALWAYS FEEL THAT SOMETHING BAD IS GOING TO HAPPEN?

People who have been through life-threatening events may stay on high alert. These people feel tense much of the time. They react as though there is danger, even when there is no danger. Their bodies react this way to make sure that they won't miss any sign that such an event may occur again. People with PTSD are not able to control feelings of wanting to run away, wanting to defend themselves or wanting to be prepared for something terrible or painful.

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## COULD MY HEALTH PROBLEMS BE RELATED TO PTSD?

Other problems often come with PTSD. Many people get depressed. Some people may get dizzy, have chest pain or stomach problems or get sick often. Other people with PTSD use alcohol or other drugs to help them deal with symptoms. This can develop into a serious problem.

Dealing with new stresses may be harder for a person who has experienced a traumatic event. New situations can bring back old memories or feelings. For example, a short power outage might bring back terrible memories and feelings for a person who has lived through power blackouts during war.

**Often people seek help from their doctor for illnesses or emotional problems without realizing that the problems may be linked to PTSD. Yet getting help for PTSD often improves the other problems.**

## COULD PTSD BE AFFECTING MY RELATIONSHIPS?

Symptoms of PTSD can make it hard to get along with people. This can lead to problems with family, friends and co-workers. When a person constantly worries or feels guilty, has poor sleep patterns, uses alcohol or other drugs, or has no feelings, these issues can strain relationships. It's hard to be with a person who seems to get angry for no reason or who often gets into bad moods. It's also hard to be with a person who will not go out or take part in social events.

***The good news is that there are effective treatments!***

## WHAT HELP IS AVAILABLE?

People can recover from PTSD. Some recover in six months, while others take much longer. Everyone's experience is different. The same event may be more traumatic for some people than for others.

### COUNSELLING OR THERAPY

Trauma counselling or therapy can be done one-on-one or in a group, and can be very helpful for people with PTSD. Family counselling and individual treatment can help with relationship troubles.

### MEDICATION

Psychiatrists and family doctors can prescribe medication for depression, nervousness and sleep problems (common in people with PTSD). Medication works best when a person is also in counselling.

## WHERE CAN I FIND HELP?

If you have signs or symptoms that might be PTSD, there are people who can help you find the support you need.

Contact:

- your settlement agency
- a family service agency
- a community mental health agency
- a counsellor or therapist
- your family doctor
- a community health centre
- a religious leader
- your workplace employee assistance program (EAP).

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- SEARCH FOR “PTSD” ON CAMH’S WEBSITE AT [www.camh.ca](http://www.camh.ca) for more information on PTSD and trauma.
- SEARCH FOR “MULTI-LINGUAL BROCHURES” ON THE CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION WEBSITE AT [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca) for online mental health brochures in many languages.
- CALL THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE AT **416 363-1066**. Or visit their website at [www.ccvvt.org](http://www.ccvvt.org) for services and referrals available to refugees and immigrants.

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3177 / 04-2014 / P132