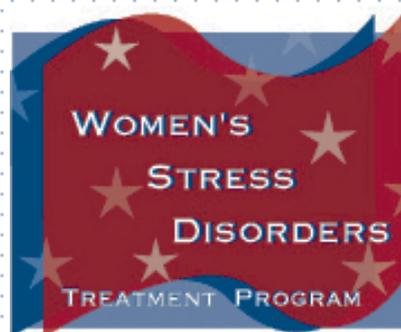


***A guide for women
with PTSD and
their families***

What the experts have to say

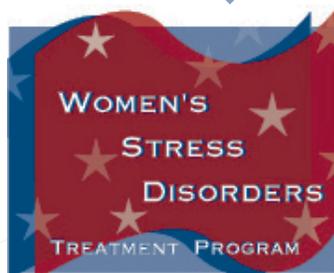


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Is this a common problem?

- ◆ More than half of the adults in the United States have experienced at least one major trauma in their lives.
- ◆ The estimates about how many people have PTSD vary. The current expert consensus is that 5% of people currently have PTSD and 8% have had PTSD at some time in their lives (Foa et al, 1999), with women having a higher incidence (12%).



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What exactly is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

In order to be diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) a person must have been exposed to an extreme stressor and be experiencing a specific set of symptoms that has lasted for at least one month.



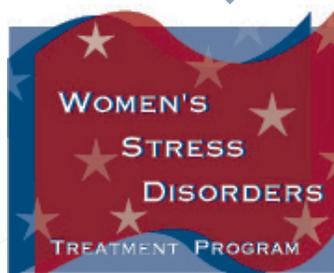
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What qualifies as an extreme stressor?

- ◆ In general, it means things out of the realm of ordinary experience.
- ◆ These include things like a serious accident or natural disaster, rape or criminal assault, combat, child sexual or physical abuse or severe neglect, witnessing a traumatic event, or the sudden untimely death of a loved one.

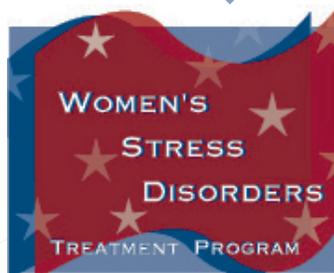


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So not every type of stress qualifies?

- ◆ Right. Other types of severe (though not extreme as defined here) stress are certainly upsetting, but do not meet the diagnostic criteria for PTSD.
- ◆ Examples of these stresses include losing a job, divorce, failing in school, or the death of an elderly parent.

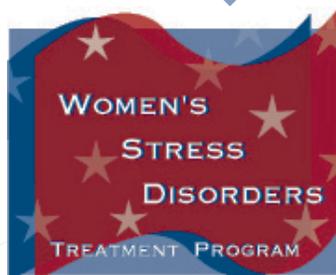


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***What kinds of symptoms
does someone with
PTSD have?***

- ◆ There are three main categories of symptoms:
- ◆ Re-experiencing the traumatic event
- ◆ Avoidance and emotional numbing
- ◆ Increased arousal

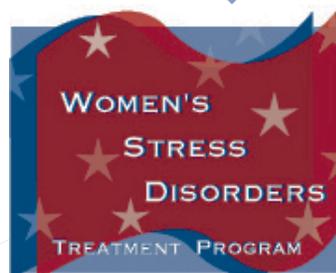


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What are some examples of re-experiencing?

- ◆ Nightmares of the event or other frightening images
- ◆ Flashbacks (feeling as though the event were recurring)
- ◆ Intrusive, upsetting memories of the event
- ◆ Exaggerated emotional and physical reactions to “triggers” that remind the person of the event

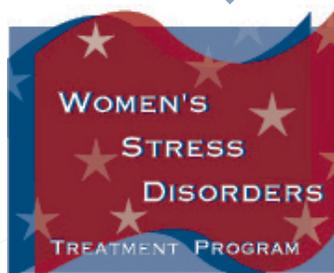


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Avoidance and emotional numbing?

- ◆ Extreme avoidance of activities, places, thoughts or feelings related to the event
- ◆ Loss of interest in most things
- ◆ Feeling detached, separate from others
- ◆ Difficulty feeling things, or very muted feelings



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And, examples of increased arousal?

- ◆ Difficulty sleeping
- ◆ Irritability or anger outbursts
- ◆ Difficulty concentrating
- ◆ Extreme watchfulness and vigilance
- ◆ Being easily startled, very “jumpy”

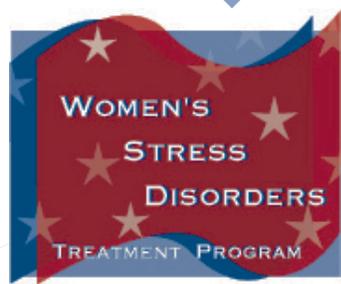


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Is PTSD the only thing you might have after a stressor?

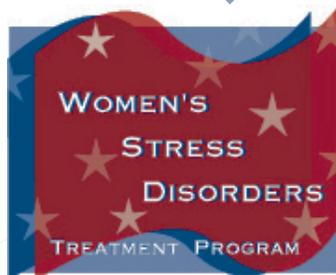
- ◆ No. Sometimes there are other or additional problems connected with trauma. Generally these will improve when the PTSD is treated, though they may sometimes need to be focused on separately.
- ◆ We'll give some examples of these in the next slides.



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Panic attacks

- ◆ People who have experienced a panic attack sometimes describe them as feeling like they were going to crawl out of their skin, feeling like they were “losing it”, or feeling like they were dying.
- ◆ These feelings of intense fear or discomfort are typically accompanied by physical symptoms, which may include a racing heart, sweating, shortness of breath, nausea, chills or hot flushes.

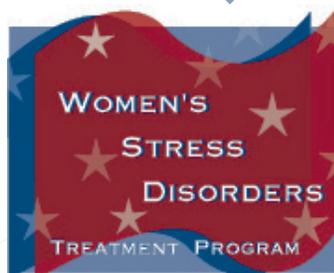


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Extremely avoidant behavior

- ◆ Avoidance of reminders of the event is a hallmark characteristic of PTSD. At times it limits people's ability to fulfill their basic obligations or meet their life goals.
- ◆ Sometimes, this avoidance gets "generalized", which means that a person avoids everything, not just specific reminders of the event. For some people this reaches the extreme of never leaving their home.



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Depression

We mean more than just “blue” or “down in the dumps”

- Not caring about or enjoying things that used to be enjoyable
- Unjustified feelings of guilt, self-blame, or self-criticism
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Suicidal thoughts or feelings (* talk with a professional if you are feeling this)



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Overuse of alcohol or drugs

- ◆ Sometimes people try to numb the emotional pain with alcohol or drugs, including prescribed medications used in a way they were not prescribed.
- ◆ While it is understandable why a person may want to do this, it does backfire, making treatment and long term success impossible.

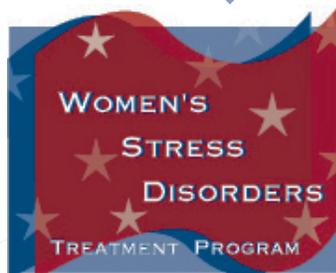


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Problems in relationships

- ◆ Feeling so alienated or isolated that you feel you “don’t belong” or that others wouldn’t understand.
- ◆ Having difficulty trusting others or feeling easily betrayed by others.
- ◆ It is common for misunderstandings to crop up in relationships as a result of these.



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Anger or irritability

- ◆ Anytime a person has been wronged, it makes sense that they feel some anger.
- ◆ Extreme anger, however, can get in the way of getting better, in part because it creates problems in relationships with others.

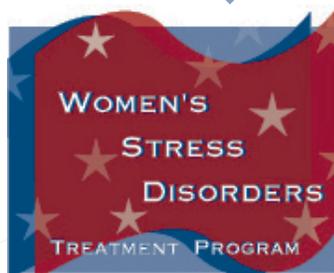


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*Does everyone have
all those things?*

- ◆ Not necessarily. People's reactions may vary from almost no difficulty or some symptoms for a relatively brief time, to long-lasting effects.
- ◆ If the effects last longer than a month and are interfering with a person's work, relationships, or recreation, they should consult with a professional about ways to better address the problems.



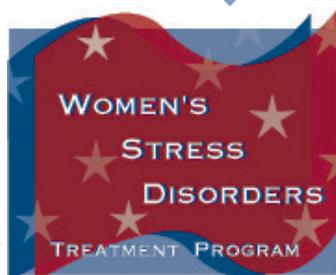
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Why do some people “get over it” more quickly than others?

These factors tend to influence how severely or how long a person is affected:

- How severe the stress was
- How long it lasted
- If the stress was inflicted by another person
- How dangerous it seemed
- How often a person had been exposed to trauma in the past
- Whether the survivor got negative reactions from others



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What do people do that makes it harder to get over it?

- ◆ Keeping it bottled up inside and not ever talking about it with anyone
- ◆ Staying stuck in intense anger or guilt
- ◆ Using alcohol or other drugs to numb the emotional pain
- ◆ Avoiding facing the reminders of the stress

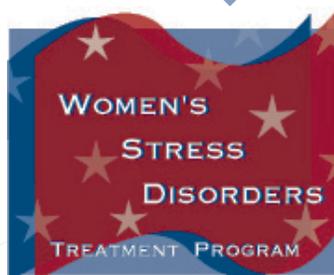


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What can people do to get better?

- ◆ Two types of treatment are helpful: psychotherapy and medication.
- ◆ For some people, psychotherapy alone or medication alone is enough.
- ◆ For others a combination of the two is the best approach.



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How would someone decide?

- ◆ Discuss this with your health care provider.
- ◆ In general, psychotherapy alone may be best for you if your symptoms are milder or if you should not take medications due to pregnancy or a medical condition.
- ◆ For more information, view the “Medications” module.



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When is medication needed?

- ◆ If your symptoms are severe or have lasted a long time
- ◆ If you have another mental health problem, such as depression or anxiety, that is making it hard for you to recover
- ◆ If you are thinking about suicide
- ◆ If you are having major problems functioning
- ◆ If psychotherapy alone hasn't worked

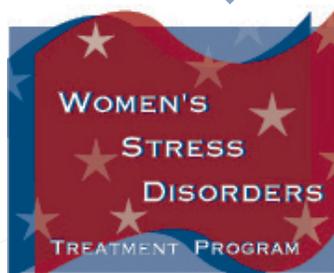


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What kinds of psychotherapy work?

- ◆ Approaches that fall under the general heading of “Cognitive-Behavioral” have the most evidence supporting their effectiveness.
- ◆ These approaches help you take charge of your thoughts and teach skills, such as relaxation, breathing retraining or assertiveness, so you can achieve a more balanced emotional life.



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Tell me more about these

- ◆ “Exposure therapy” and “systematic desensitization” are ways of helping you confront specific situations, memories or reminders that stir up fear that is out of proportion to the real risk.
- ◆ Your therapist will either ask you to repeatedly retell the stressful event or to gradually put yourself in the (actually safe) anxiety-provoking situation and practice riding out the fear so that it diminishes.

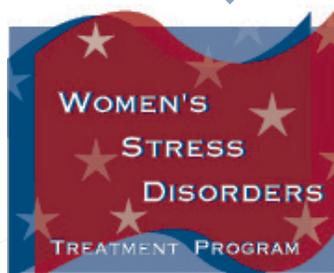


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Are there other types of psychotherapy that work?

- ◆ Education and supportive therapy is useful in increasing people's understanding of PTSD and its treatment.
- ◆ EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing) has some evidence supporting its effectiveness.
- ◆ Psychodynamic psychotherapy focuses on insight about one's problems.
- ◆ These approaches all have some usefulness, but were not as highly ranked by experts.



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What can a person with PTSD do to help her recovery?

- ◆ Learn about the psychological effects of trauma
- ◆ Talk about your problems gradually with trusted others
- ◆ Make yourself face (safe) situations that remind you of the trauma
- ◆ Seek psychotherapy and stick with it
- ◆ Take medications as prescribed
- ◆ Avoid alcohol and street drugs

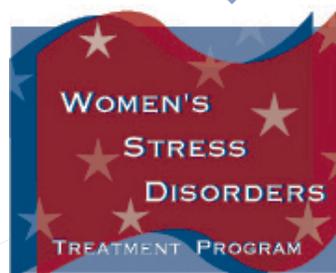


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What can families and friends do to help?

- ◆ Learn about the psychological effects of trauma
- ◆ Be a good listener (supportive without trying to fix her or solve the problem)
- ◆ Encourage your loved one to stick with her treatment
- ◆ Consider family counseling



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