



FACT SHEET

Brain Injury & PTSD

***Do you
have
trouble
with
PTSD
since
your
brain
injury?***

What does this mean?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can occur after a person has been through a traumatic event. These events can include: Natural disasters, car crashes, sexual or physical assaults, terrorist attacks, and combat during wartime. During a traumatic event, a person's life or the lives of others may be in danger. They may feel afraid or feel that they have no control over what is happening. And if the person has a traumatic brain injury (TBI) too, these feelings of lack of control and fear can cause additional problems with confusion, memory, or intense emotions.

How might a brain injury affect PTSD?

More than 5 million people in the United States suffer from PTSD and it can often go hand-in-hand with TBI as the symptoms often overlap.

Common examples of PTSD:

Generally, symptoms of PTSD can occur when a person experiences unwanted and intrusive memories of the traumatic event, tries to avoid thinking about it, or is experiencing high levels of anxiety related to the event. Some of the most common symptoms include:

- ◆ Recurrent nightmares.
- ◆ "Flashbacks."
- ◆ Being *physically* responsive, such as experiencing a surge in your heart rate or sweating, to reminders of the traumatic event.
- ◆ Difficulty in falling or staying asleep.
- ◆ Irritability or outbursts of anger.
- ◆ Constantly "on guard", like danger is lurking around the corner.
- ◆ Avoiding thoughts, feelings, or conversations about the traumatic event.
- ◆ Going numb or having a loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities.
- ◆ Difficulties having positive feelings (i.e., happiness or love).

Recommended strategies:

Not all people who are traumatized develop PTSD; but for those who do, treatment brings hope. Sometimes counseling called cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is effective; medicines known as SSRIs can help too, like Zoloft or Paxil. Sometimes a combination of both therapies proves successful.

Here are some strategies to help with PTSD:

- ◆ Find a therapist.
- ◆ Join a support group or other support services.
- ◆ Find a peer mentor.
- ◆ Meditate or use other relaxation strategies.

Sometimes PTSD, especially in conjunction with TBI, can lead to unhealthy behavior like substance abuse or taking unnecessary risks. Sharing experiences, feelings, and fears with others, whether with friends, family, or a professional, can lessen the burden.