

# COPING WITH POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS SYMPTOMS

July, 2021

## General Coping Strategies:

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Certain actions can help to reduce your distressing symptoms and make things better. These actions can result in changes that last into the future. Here are some positive coping methods:

### Educate Yourself About Trauma and PTSD

When you learn that the symptoms of PTSD are normal following traumatic events, you realize that you are not alone, weak, or crazy. When you seek treatment and begin to understand your response to trauma, you will be better able to cope with the symptoms of PTSD. The following websites are a good place to start for information on PTSD:

<http://www.tricare.mil/coveredservices/mental/programs>

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/>

### Practice Relaxation Methods

- muscle relaxation exercises
- breathing exercises
- meditation, yoga
- swimming, stretching
- prayer
- listening to quiet music
- spending time in nature

### Distract Yourself with Positive Activities

Often individuals with PTSD feel like isolating themselves. However, pleasant social, recreational, or work activities can be very helpful in distracting a person from traumatic memories and help reduce unwanted reactions. Pleasant activities can also improve your overall mood and life satisfaction.

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## **STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH SPECIFIC PTSD SYMPTOMS**

### **Unwanted Distressing Memories, Images or Thoughts**

- Remind yourself that they are just that, memories.
- Remind yourself that it's natural to have some memories of the trauma(s).
- Remember that, although reminders of trauma can feel overwhelming, telling your story to a supportive listener may help the memories fade over time.

### **Sudden Feelings of Anxiety or Panic**

- Remind yourself that these reactions are not dangerous. If you had them while exercising, they most likely would not worry you.
- Remind yourself that thoughts like "I'm going to die," "I'm having a heart attack," or "I will lose control" are not true and only increase the anxiety.
- Practice relaxation strategies.
- Talk to your provider about other techniques to address anxiety and panic.

### **Feeling Like The Trauma Is Happening Again (Flashbacks)**

- Keep your eyes open. Look around you and notice where you are.
- Talk to yourself. Remind yourself that you are safe. The trauma happened in the past and you are in the present.
- Call someone you trust and tell them what is happening.
- Remind yourself that this is a common response after trauma.
- Tell your provider about the flashback(s).

### **Dreams And Nightmares Related To The Traumatic Event**

- If you wake up from a nightmare in a panic, remind yourself that you are reacting to a dream, not because you are in real danger.
- Get up out of bed, regroup, and orient yourself to the here and now.

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- Engage in a pleasant, calming activity. Talk to someone if possible.

## **Difficulty Falling Or Staying Asleep**

- Talk to your provider about behavioral interventions for sleep.

## **Irritability, Anger Or Rage**

- Walk away from the situation, cool off, and think things over.
- Exercise daily to reduce body tension and relieve stress.
- If you blow up at family members or friends, find time when you are calm to talk about how you feel and what you are doing to cope with your reactions.

## **Difficulty Concentrating Or Staying Focused**

- Write things down. Making “to do” lists may be helpful.
- Break tasks down into small do-able chunks.
- Plan a realistic number of events or tasks for each day.

## **Trouble Feeling Or Expressing Positive Emotions**

- Continue to engage in activities that you used to enjoy even if you don't feel like it at the time.
- Find ways to express your caring in little ways: write a card, leave a small gift, or phone someone and say hello.

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