

Recovering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder



Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) has long been observed in soldiers returning from war. In World War I it was called *shell shock* and then *battle fatigue* in World War II. PTSD is a mental health problem associated with people who have witnessed or participated in terrifying events. It is the ongoing effects of the trauma the person experienced because of the event.

PTSD is a problem for millions people. In fact, about 3.6% of adult Americans, about 5.2 million people, suffer from PTSD during the course of a year and an estimated 8 million Americans will experience it at some point in their lives.

Recognizing PTSD

The indications for PTSD are divided into four main categories. If you, or someone you know, is experiencing any of them following a traumatic event they should read this issue of *Sunshine Sharing*.

The first category, *intrusive memories*, are recurrent distressing memories of the event that continually come, unwanted, into a person's mind. They may relive the traumatic event as if it were happening again (flashbacks) or suffer from nightmares about it.

The second group of indications occurs around *avoidance*. The person tries to avoid thinking or talking about what happened and avoids places, activities and people that remind them of the traumatic event.

The third group involves *changes in thinking or mood*. This may include feeling hopeless about the future, feeling detached from family or friends, finding it difficult to experience positive emotions, feeling emotionally numb or losing interest in previously enjoyed activities.

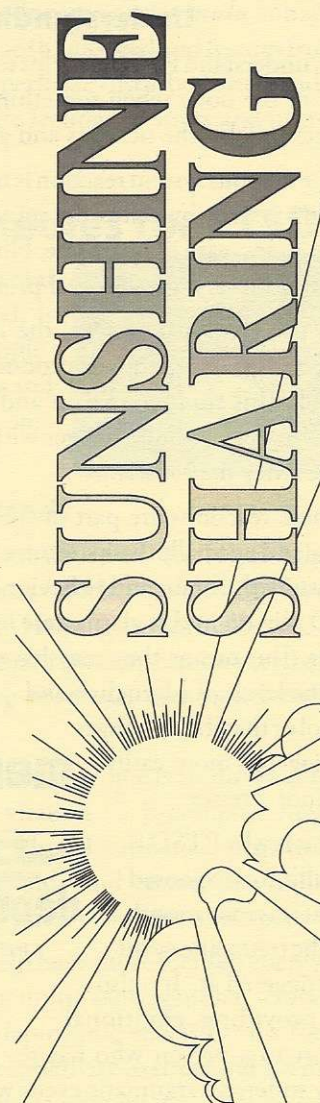
The final group of indications involve *emotional and physical reactions* such as being easily startled or frightened or always being on the lookout for danger. The victim of PTSD may have trouble sleeping or concentrating and may engage in self-destructive behavior, such as addictions or reckless driving. People with PTSD may also experience suicidal thoughts and attempt to end their own life.

Events Triggering PTSD

While being primarily associated with combat, you don't have to go to war to experience trauma that can lead to PTSD. The most common events people experience that lead to the development of PTSD include being involved in combat, being a victim or witness in a violent crime, experiencing sexual or physical assault, childhood abuse, being sexually molested, being threatened with a weapon, getting into a severe accident, being involved in a natural disaster or receiving a life-threatening medical diagnosis. In addition just seeing someone close to you, such as a parent, sibling, in any of these situations can also lead to trauma.

Trauma is a very personal thing. What is traumatic varies from person to person. So, even if you haven't experienced any of the above situations, any unresolved trauma could still lead to signs of PTSD.

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Your guide to better health the natural way.

Important Notice

The information in *Sunshine Sharing* is for educational purposes only and should not be used to diagnose and treat diseases. If you have a health problem, we recommend you consult a competent health practitioner before embarking on any course of treatment.

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Understanding PTSD

To understand PTSD, it helps to understand the changes that occur in the body when something frightening occurs. These changes involve the nervous and glandular systems.

The nervous system reaction is to upregulate the sympathetic nervous system by releasing epinephrine or adrenaline. This causes an increase in heart rate, blood pressure and muscle tension. It inhibits digestion and primes the body to react.

In the glandular system, the hypothalamus and pituitary signal the adrenal glands to produce glucocorticoids, primarily cortisol. This suppresses pain and inflammation and allows a person to deal with the danger without being distracted by any injuries they may sustain.

These reactions are part of the alarm state of the stress response and normally dissipate once the threat is over. Researchers who study the brain and behavior have found that people with PTSD remain in this alarm state long after the traumatic event is over. This means they may have higher baseline levels of adrenaline and cortisol or that these changes are triggered more easily by minor stresses.

This is why PTSD is typically not diagnosed until at least one month after the traumatic event that triggered it. It's also why providing emotional support to a person who has recently suffered a traumatic event will help prevent PTSD. A person is more likely to develop PTSD from an event if they don't have this kind of emotional support from family, friends, a spiritual guide or a counselor.

They are also more likely to develop PTSD if the trauma is intense or long-lasting. For example, people whose jobs put them in frequent danger such as police, firefighters and military personnel are at high risk for PTSD. A person is also at higher risk if they experienced trauma or abuse in childhood or had pre-existing problems with anxiety, depression or substance abuse.

The constant elevation of this fight-or-flight mechanism has a negative impact on the person with PTSD. It can make them chronically anxious, constantly vigilant waiting for the next dangerous thing to happen. It can also make them excessively irritable. It also causes physical problems such as chronic muscle tension, high blood pressure and heart rate, poor digestion, sleep disorders and changes in brain function.

Changes in Brain Function

The primary areas of the brain affected by PTSD include the amygdala, the hippocampus and the pre-frontal cortex. This area of the brain is associated with emotions and memory.

The amygdala is one of the first parts of the brain to develop in children and functions to recognize people and things and create an appropriate emotional response to them. In PTSD this area of the brain is hyper-aroused which can cause the fight-or-flight mechanism to be easily triggered.

You've probably experienced situations where someone is touchy about some subject. They react with sudden intense emotions to an otherwise innocent remark or action. This is due to an association in the amygdala which causes them to perceive the situation, comment or action as potentially dangerous even when there is no real danger.

According to Dr. Bessel Van der Kolk, psychotherapist and author of *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, "MRI brain scans clearly show that images of past trauma activate the right hemisphere of the brain and deactivate the left." The left brain is linguistic, sequential and analytical. It helps make sense of the world. The right brain, on the other hand, is more intuitive, visual, tactual and emotional. It stores memories of sensory inputs and the emotional responses they evoke.

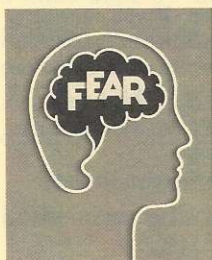
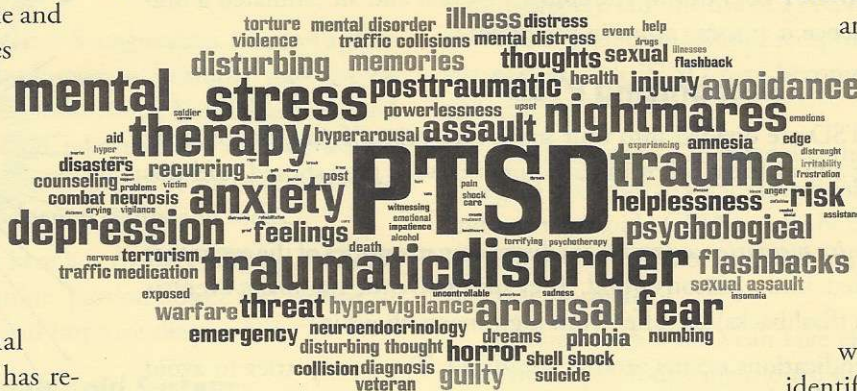
This means that when someone is traumatized there is a loss of executive function in the brain. They are more likely to react emotionally to things without being able clearly to identify what is really dangerous or the cause and effect relationship between their behavior and the consequences they are experiencing in life.

Dr. Van der Kolk notes, that the parts of the brain that monitor for danger remain over-active in trauma survivors. Activation of these stress mechanisms can create overwhelming emotions that make it difficult for them to connect with other people. This is unfortunate because close emotional connection with other people and actual loving physical touch, such as hugs, are essential to recovery from trauma.

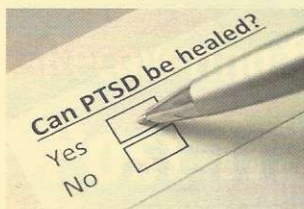
These post-traumatic reactions make it difficult for the person with PTSD to connect with other people, since closeness often triggers the sense of danger. Yet, this close contact with other people is the thing a person with PTSD needs the most in order to heal.

Therefore, it's essential for anyone suffering from PTSD to get help from some type of counseling or therapy that can help them make logical sense of what happened and help them reconnect with other people.

In the next section we'll focus on the various natural therapies and remedies that will help support the recovery process and how they can help restore balance (homeostasis) to the nervous and glandular systems.



Holistic Therapies for PTSD



A comprehensive program to support general health will aid recovery from PTSD. The first thing to do is to be willing to allow family, friends or professionals to help. A good counseling program or help

from a pastor, minister or spiritual adviser is very important.

People usually neglect self-care when they are stressed and this is especially true for people with PTSD. They may skip meals, fail to get exercise and have poor sleep patterns. They often indulge in refined carbohydrates, excessive amounts of coffee and alcohol and may use marijuana or other drugs to numb their emotional pain.

A person with PTSD needs to be encouraged to eat regularly and consume nutrient-dense foods rather than simple carbohydrates like white flour and refined sugar. This helps to stabilize blood sugar level, which helps to stabilize brain function. Drinking plenty of water and avoiding caffeinated beverages and alcohol is also a good idea.

Exercise has been shown to increase serotonin and endorphin production, which helps improve mood. It also helps balance blood sugar and burn off stress hormones. Exercising outdoors in the fresh air and sunshine will also help because stimulation of the pineal gland by natural light aids melatonin production and increases levels of vitamin D. This helps sleep, mood and immunity.

Sleep Aids for PTSD

People with PTSD may also have problems getting to sleep or staying asleep. Taking herbs that relax the nerves and muscles may help them get to sleep. These herbs include **kava kava**, **scullcap**, **valerian**, **hops** and **passionflower** before bed. Try a **Relaxing Sleep Formula** containing herbs like these. Putting the contents of one or two 200 milligram capsules of **magnesium** under the tongue shortly before bed is also helpful for relaxing the nerves.



If you can't stay asleep, balancing blood sugar may help. Try having a small protein snack (i.e. nut butter, cheese) an hour or so prior to bedtime and avoid having any sweets and caffeine in

the evening. A **Chinese Fire-Increasing Formula** containing schisandra, Oriental arborvitae (biota) seed and lycium fruit has helped many people who experience disturbed sleep and restless dreams. It helps modulate feelings of stress and overcome emotional burnout.

Specific Remedies for PTSD

In addition to the general therapies we've just discussed, it is helpful to use specific supplements to rebalance the glands and nervous system. Here are some suggestions.



Rebuild the Adrenal Glands

PTSD may involve an imbalance in the Hypothalamus, Pituitary, Adrenal (HPA) axis, which regulates the levels of stress hormones in the body. Helping to normalize the HPA axis and restore normal adrenal function can be very helpful. The **Chinese Fire Increasing Formula**, mentioned earlier, is often helpful in doing this.

An even better option for many people is an **Adrenal Glandular Formula** containing vitamin C, B-complex vitamins, magnesium, schisandra and adrenal substance. This helps to rebuild exhausted adrenal glands and restore the ability to handle mental and emotional stress in a more constructive way.

A third option that can help have more focused energy is an **Ashwagandha Complex** containing ashwagandha, schisandra, rhodiola and bacopa. The adaptogenic effects of this formula can help calm down any hyperreactivity to stress and aid mental focus and clarity. While ashwagandha by itself can be used to aid sleep, this combination is too stimulating.

Balance the Brain and Nervous System

In PTSD the sympathetic neurotransmitters, particularly epinephrine, have been upregulated creating chronic feelings of anxiety or irritability. Supplements can help tip the balance back to the parasympathetic nervous system and the calming neurotransmitters like GABA.

Zinc and **magnesium** are both helpful in calming the brain and nervous system and many people are deficient in both. If you are easily bothered by small noises, have chronically tense muscles and/or don't sleep soundly you may be deficient in magnesium. Start by taking 200-400 mg. a day and gradually work up to 800-1000 mg. per day. If you develop loose stools at any point, back off the dose.

Symptoms of zinc deficiency include poor wound healing, a loss of the sense of smell and taste (this can manifest as food losing its appeal), grey hair or hair loss, reduced immune function and irritability. If you have these problems you may also wish to supplement with zinc. The dose is 5-25 milligrams daily.

Additional Help and Information

For more information about working with PTSD contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also consult the following resources:

The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma by Bessel van der Kolk

In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness by Peter A. Levine

CBD: A Patient's Guide to Medical Cannabis by Leonard Leinow and Juliana Birnbaum

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An **Anti-Anxiety Formula** with magnesium, zinc and a plant extract from the kanna plant known as Zembrin® may also be helpful for rebalancing the nervous system. Kanna has been used in South Africa to elevate mood, relieve anxiety and depression, and regulate sleep. A small dose of Zembrin® increases the sense of well-being and enhances mental clarity and focus.

Another useful remedy here is a **Brain Calming Formula** containing GABA, l-glutamine, passion flower and taurine. It can increase calm feelings and improve sleep.

Balance the Endocannabinoid System

The recently discovered endocannabinoid system (ECS) brings new insights in how to help people with PTSD. The ECS helps maintain balance in the nervous system, which aids emotional well-being. Research has revealed that there is a high concentration of cannabinoid receptors in the amygdala, which regulates the stress response. After a stressful event, there is an increase in endocannabinoids which downregulate the stress signals and help return to a balanced mental and emotional state.

It has also been discovered that there are low levels of endocannabinoids in people with PTSD. One study found low levels of anandamide, an endocannabinoid that has been called the bliss molecule, in people with PTSD. This research suggests that PTSD may involve a malfunctioning ECS.

People with PTSD often use cannabis (marijuana) either medically or recreationally to ease their PTSD symptoms. In a study done by the New Mexico Medical Cannabis Program, patients reported over 75% reduction in symptoms with cannabis use. Another study done in Israel found that THC improved sleep quality, reduced the number of nightmares and eased hyper arousal.

The phytocannabinoid known as THC attaches to receptors in the nerve cells involved in stress and downregulates them.

Unfortunately, chronic use of THC rich cannabis will decrease the body's endocannabinoid receptors over time. This means the person with PTSD may become dependent on cannabis to feel good.

A better approach to balancing the ECS is to use CBD and omega-3 essential fatty acids to support the body's production of endocannabinoids. CBD can also be combined with traditional stress-relieving herbs or essential oils which will help the ECS function normally.

A person with PTSD can take either CBD oil along with some of the previously mentioned supplements for the adrenal glands and nervous system or a **CBD Relaxing Formula**. This is a blend that combines CBD with essential oils like lavender and lemongrass as well as hops cone oil and magnolia flower oil to downregulate the stress reaction in the nervous system and help restore calm.

Hemp seed oil is naturally rich in omega-3 fatty acids and a **Hemp Oil with Terpenes Formula**, which also contains turmeric root extract and peppermint oil, can be used as an alternative to CBD for balancing endocannabinoid function in states where CBD is not readily available.

Restoring Awareness

The goal of counseling and therapy in PTSD is to help people reconnect with their logical left brain and make sense of what has happened to them. An additional tool that works well with counseling is a **Shock and Injury Flower Essence Blend** containing the essences of arnica, star of Bethlehem, rock rose, impatiens, clematis, cherry plum and red clover. This is a general remedy for restoring presence and awareness during any kind of emotional shock or physical trauma. It can also be used to help a person connect with and heal from trauma in the past.