PTSD in one page

What it is

What is PTSD?

PTSD, or post-traumatic stress disorder, is a mental health condition that can follow a frightening or horrific event. Memories of it keep coming back, you avoid reminders, and you stay on guard for danger. It is common, and a GP can start the assessment.

- PTSD can follow a frightening or horrific event
- About 12 in 100 Australians have it in their lives
- Women have it about twice as often as men

The signs

What are the symptoms of PTSD?

PTSD symptoms fall into four groups: reliving the event through memories, flashbacks or nightmares, avoiding reminders, feeling numb or to blame, and staying on high alert. Symptoms that continue more than a month after the event may be a sign of PTSD.

- Memories, flashbacks and nightmares keep coming back
- People avoid places and talk that bring it back
- Numbness, guilt and blame are common

How a diagnosis happens

How do I get help for PTSD?

Start with your usual GP, who writes a Mental Health Treatment Plan and refers you to a psychologist. Ask for a trauma-focused therapy by name. If work, DVA or a crime is involved, another scheme may pay for more.

- Book a long appointment with your usual GP.
- The GP writes a plan with a provisional or formal diagnosis.
- Ask for one of the five therapies by name.

Treatment

What therapy is used for PTSD?

Five, for adults with PTSD: trauma-focused CBT, cognitive processing therapy, cognitive therapy, prolonged exposure and EMDR, all strongly recommended. Others are conditional, mostly a fallback when those are unavailable or unacceptable. Some have too little evidence for any recommendation.

Medication

Why does the guideline put therapy before medication?

Australia's guideline makes trauma-focused psychological therapy the first line and medication a second line option. It then names five situations where it suggests medication anyway, including a long wait for therapy. Your prescriber decides what applies to you.

- A long wait for therapy is one reason it suggests medication

Who diagnoses and who prescribes

Who can diagnose PTSD, and does it matter?

A GP, a psychologist or a psychiatrist can. For a Medicare plan, your GP's provisional diagnosis is enough. Who made it matters on some forms, which want a doctor's signature or a named manual.

- A psychiatrist can diagnose, usually on a GP referral

Some of this differs by state and territory. See the pages on your state at haihealth.au/blog/ptsd.

In danger? Call 000. Lifeline 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14, or chat online.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.

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