

Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in detail (do any apply to you?)

This could be used as your checklist:

INTRUSION

- ❑ **Flashbacks** – you feel like the trauma is literally **happening all over again**, often with vivid sensory experiences of sound, smell, sight, etc.
- ❑ **Intrusive memories** – you get vivid recollections of ‘pieces’ of the traumatic event; you can’t stop thinking about certain aspects of the experience; horror images keep popping into mind as if your brain is stuck there.

- ❑ You might also be unable to recall other important details – your memory has ‘missing pieces’.
- ❑ **Upsetting dreams/nightmares** – your dreams may be like re-living the experience in sleep and may connect to the **arousal cluster** of symptoms, as you wake sweating and terrified; your nightmares may be **worse** than what actually happened, as they may symbolise your worst fears or represent the deepest terror connected to how you felt during the event.
- ❑ **Memory ‘triggers’** – a small occurrence in everyday life, such as a sound, smell, a look on someone’s face or a news broadcast, may set off a chain of memory ‘bits’ and you have intense distress reactions associated with them.
- ❑ **Feeling ‘triggers’** – sometimes referred to as ‘feeling flashbacks’, where being in an anxious/aroused state that resembles feelings experienced during the traumatic event (for example, being squeezed and jostled by the crowd while waiting to get on a train) will trigger reactions such as profound fear, twitching or a sense of utter helplessness that’s an over-the-top response to the current situation.

AVOIDANCE

- You make serious **efforts to avoid** any thoughts, feelings, persons, activities or locations that could remind you of the trauma, even those very remotely linked to the event.
- You **change your behaviour** so that memories of the trauma won't be triggered.
- You **pull away from others** so that you won't have to explain your reactions: 'I don't have the words to tell you what happened to me.'
- You **avoid social activities** or celebrations, especially if you would be expected to take a lead role or even make general conversation about how things are going for you: 'I'm not the person I was before.'
- You **put off** even short-term **future plans**.

PERSISTENT NEGATIVE THOUGHT/ MOOD

- You have new and/or **exaggerated negative beliefs** about yourself.
- You **blame yourself** for aspects of the trauma that you could not possibly have foreseen.
- You feel ultra-responsible, or **permanently harmed or changed**.

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- You **doubt your ability** to cope with even simple things that would not have been a problem before.
- You feel **isolated and set apart** from others.
- You **cannot remember important aspects** of the trauma(s) and feel that is your fault.
- You feel **emotionally numb**, and have persistent **difficulty experiencing positive emotions** like satisfaction, happiness or loving feelings, in a way that you didn't before.
- You feel **set apart and detached** from activities or causes that used to be important to you.
- You **dwell on negative aspects** of the world and yourself in an exaggerated way, such as: *'The world is dangerous', 'No one can be trusted', 'I'm not safe to be around'*.
- You feel **'doomed' or 'jinxed'**.

AROUSAL

- You feel **keyed-up or 'hyper'** all the time.
- You're uncharacteristically **irritable**; you have angry **outbursts** or outraged confrontations with others, which is not like your normal self.
- You're constantly **scanning for danger** and

you have **extreme startle reactions** when surprised by something trivial.

- You **can't fall asleep** – you're '**afraid**' to **sleep**, and you have difficulty staying asleep or going back to sleep when wakened.
- You have **problems** (not present before the trauma) **maintaining concentration** or focus on tasks.
- You've become **hyper-sensitive to loud/sudden noises**.
- You engage in **reckless** or potentially **self-harming behaviours** or significantly increase **substance abuse**.

I have *some* of those symptoms but *not all of them* – does this mean that I don't really have PTSD?

You don't need all of the symptoms in each category to be diagnosed as having PTSD. Each category involves a cluster of emotional reactions which may vary in intensity and fluctuate in how frequently they are present from day to day. Sometimes one symptom cluster will be much more active, for example, feeling on 'red alert' all day, even without flashbacks or

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avoidance, or having many flashbacks and ‘mini-memory-flashes’ even when you’re consciously not avoiding any part of your normal activities. Whether the onset of symptoms has been immediate or delayed, they must have been present for at least one **month** and be continuing for the condition to be considered PTSD.

For some, not getting a full diagnosis of PTSD will affect whether they receive legal compensation or qualify for disability or injury claims. Obviously, diagnosis requires a full assessment from several qualified practitioners, and you shouldn’t make assumptions on your own from the list on the previous pages.