

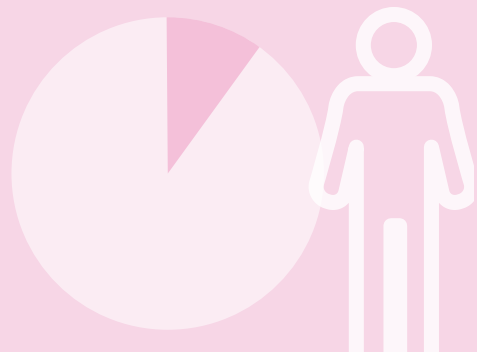


The experience of trauma

Most Australians will experience, or be exposed to, a potentially traumatic event (PTE) at least once in their lifetime¹



Between **5-10%** of Australians will develop PTSD in their lifetime²



What is it?

A traumatic event is one that threatens your life or safety, or the lives of people around you. They are extremely common, and may lead to post-traumatic stress disorder. This article explores the impact of trauma and why early intervention is important.

Most Australians will experience, or be exposed to, a potentially traumatic event (PTE) at least once in their lifetime¹.

PTEs can be a single event or happen repeatedly. Common examples include:

- A home or workplace accident;
- Physical or sexual assault;
- Domestic violence;
- Childhood abuse or neglect;
- A natural disaster;
- An act of terrorism; and
- Exposure to another person’s trauma.

These situations may be life-threatening or have the potential to cause serious injury.

The impact a traumatic event has on a person varies depending on factors such as an individual’s background, experiences and personality. The intensity and range of

emotions felt may also differ but often include feelings of fear, anger, shame, terror, guilt, numbness, powerlessness or hopelessness.

In the case of one-off events, the initial emotional distress felt usually subsides within a number of weeks for the majority of people. However some people experience continued distress and are at risk of developing a trauma-related mental health condition called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). They may also develop a comorbid mental health condition like depression, anxiety disorder or substance use disorder. People who have experienced repeated or ongoing trauma are more likely to suffer adverse biopsychosocial outcomes.

What is post-traumatic stress disorder?

Post-traumatic stress disorder

Between 5 and 10 per cent of Australians will develop PTSD in their lifetime². This condition can be extremely distressing and typically involves:

- Re-living the traumatic event which may result in nightmares, flashbacks, heart palpitations or panic;
- Difficulty concentrating, sleeping, feeling angry or irritable, being paranoid or easily startled; and
- Negative thoughts and feelings, losing interest in day-to-day activities and withdrawing from friends/family/work.

Making an insurance claim

In the case of an insurance claim, it's important to realise that post trauma symptoms may arise at different time points in a person's recovery. This may be days, weeks, months or even years after the initial event. Therefore early intervention is key. Ideally this will involve a tailored stepped care approach to help an individual recover and return to wellness.

Protect yourself: Minimise risk

It may sound obvious, but one of the keys to recovery is finding a way to cope. Below are some suggestions from Phoenix Australia.

Recognise that you have been through an extremely stressful event and having an emotional reaction to it is normal. Even if you coped well with similar events in the past, this does not mean that you won't be affected by the trauma you are experiencing now.

Look after yourself by getting plenty of rest (even if you can't sleep), regular exercise, and by eating well-balanced meals. Physical and mental health are closely linked, so taking care of one will help the other.

Cut back on tea, coffee, sugar, soft drink and cigarettes. Your body is already 'hyped up', and these substances will only add to this. Try to avoid using drugs or alcohol to cope, as they can lead to more problems in the long-term.

Make time for relaxation - whether it's listening to music, going for a walk - whatever works for you.

Structure your days and try to schedule at least one enjoyable activity each day. Try making a timetable for each day, including some exercise, some work, and some relaxation.

Resume your normal routine as soon as possible, but take it easy. Don't throw yourself into activities or work in an attempt to avoid painful thoughts or memories about the trauma.

Try not to bottle up your feelings or block them out. Recurring thoughts, dreams, and flashbacks are unpleasant, but they will decrease with time.

Avoid making major life decisions like moving house or changing jobs in the days and weeks after the event. On the other hand, make as many smaller, daily decisions as possible as this can help you to feel more in control of your life.

Spend time with people you care about, even if you don't want to talk about your experience. Sometimes you will want to be alone, and that's OK too, but try not to become too isolated.

Talk about your feelings to other people who will understand, if you feel able to do so. Talking things through is part of the natural healing process and will help you to accept what has happened.

Write about your feelings if you feel unable to talk to others about them.

Keep informed of the facts through media and other information sources, but don't overdo it. Try to avoid repeated viewing of disaster or trauma scenes.

Give yourself time to re-evaluate. A traumatic event can affect the way you see the world, your life, your goals, and your relationships.

For more information:

Download a copy of Recovery after Trauma – A Guide for People with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder from www.phoenixaustralia.org.

Talk to your doctor.

Call Lifeline on 13 11 14



1. APS (2016). Management of psychological trauma across service settings and contexts. InPsych 2016, 38 (1).
2. Retrieved on 30 August from <http://phoenixaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Phoenix-About-PTSD.pdf>

This information is current as at September 2018. This article is intended to provide general information only and has been prepared without taking into account any particular person's objectives, financial situation or needs ('circumstances'). Before acting on such information, you should consider its appropriateness, taking into account your circumstances and obtain your own independent financial, legal or tax advice. You should read the relevant Product Disclosure Statement (PDS) before making any decision about a product. While all care has been taken to ensure the information is accurate and reliable, to the maximum extent the law permits. Personal Risk Professionals Pty. Ltd. are Authorised Representatives of Bombora Advice Pty Ltd ABN 40 156 250 565, AFSL 439065