ARC Mental Health Information Series

This document is intended to be information only and does not replace the opinion of a health provider.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that is triggered by a terrifying event, either experiencing it or witnessing it. Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms may start within one month of a traumatic event, but sometimes symptoms may not appear until years after the event. These symptoms cause significant problems in social or work situations and in relationships. They can also interfere with your ability to go about your normal daily tasks.

The lifetime prevalence of PTSD is 5 to 6 percent in men and 10 to 12 percent in women.

Traumatic events that may cause PTSD include:

- War
- Serious car accidents
- Sexual assault
- Witnessing or experiencing domestic violence
- A natural disaster
- Experiencing torture
- Seeing a family member, friend or other person harmed or killed

Symptoms

PTSD symptoms are generally grouped into four types: intrusive memories, avoidance, negative changes in thinking and mood, and changes in physical and emotional reactions.

Symptoms of intrusive memories may include:

- Recurrent, unwanted distressing memories of the traumatic event
- Reliving the traumatic event as if it were happening again (flashbacks)

Symptoms of avoidance may include:

- Trying to avoid thinking or talking about the traumatic event
- Avoiding places, activities or people that remind you of the traumatic event

Symptoms of negative changes in thinking and mood may include:

- Negative thoughts about yourself, other people or the world
- Hopelessness about the future
- Memory problems, including not remembering important aspects of the traumatic event

Symptoms of changes in physical and emotional reactions may include:

- Being easily startled or frightened
- Always being on guard for danger
- Self-destructive behaviour, such as drinking too much or driving too fast
- Trouble sleeping
- Trouble concentrating
- Irritability, angry outbursts or aggressive behaviour
- Overwhelming guilt or shame

For children 6 years old and younger, signs and symptoms may also include:

- Re-enacting the traumatic event or aspects of the traumatic event through play
- Frightening dreams that may or may not include aspects of the traumatic event

Resources available

Canada Life Speak. A confidential and free service available 24/7 to veterans, former RCMP members, their family members and caregivers.
Telephone: 1 (800) 268-7708, website: www.canada.lifespeak.com

CAVAC Centre pour Aide Aux Victims D'Actes Criminel – www.cavac.qc.ca, 1 (866) 532-2822

Psychosocial support available at your local CLSC and through your primary care physician.

CLSC St-Hubert (450) 443-7400
CLSC Brossard (450) 445-4452
CLSC St-Jean-sur-Richelieu (450) 358-2572
CLSC Richelieu (450) 658-7561
811 Info-Sante, press 9 for English

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