

Newsletter May 2024

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What is PTSD? Post-traumatic stress disorder can result when one is exposed to a very stressful situation, a severe trauma or life-threatening event. This may be in the form of a single event or a series of events over time. Symptoms can include recurring memories or nightmares, sleeplessness, loss of interest, feelings of numbness, anger or irritability, or being constantly on guard. The probability of a serious reaction is increased if there was life-threatening trauma to yourself, if you lost a person close to you, if you felt a lack of control in the situation, or if you experienced a lack of support afterward.

Milder cases of PTSD from the COVID pandemic are very common, and in the professional literature are sometimes classified as “acute stress disorders” or “adjustment reactions.” Affected individuals typically have many of the same symptoms as for PTSD.

For help with PTSD, veterans can obtain treatment at any Veteran Affairs Medical Center. Non-veterans can search the VA web site, among others, for appropriate *non-military* providers.

Online suggestions for those with PTSD can be found in “Understanding PTSD in Uncertain Times.” (healthmatters.nyp.org, Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center), based on a website by Jo Ann Difede, Ph.D., New York psychologist. This article, probably most useful for those with less severe symptoms, contains a list of nine practical suggestions such as “Follow a Schedule,” “Prioritize Rest and Diet,” etc. Those with more serious symptoms are advised to contact a professional with expertise in PTSD treatment: Search online for local providers.

If you have had PTSD or other symptoms resulting from the pandemic, and have found a helpful approach you like, please tell us about it at eventcoord@fastmail.com

“Stress in America 2023: A Nation Recovering from Collective Trauma” Survey by the American Psychological Association (apa.org). Arthur C. Evans, Ph.D., chief APA officer, states, “The COVID-19 pandemic created a collective experience among Americans. While the early pandemic lockdowns may seem like the distant past, the aftermath remains. We cannot ignore the fact that we have been changed by the loss of more than one million Americans, as well as the shift in our work places, school systems, and culture at large. **To move toward post-traumatic growth, we must first identify and understand the wounds that remain.**” (Why? See next.)

Further evidence: “How a Pandemic Malaise Is Shaping American Politics,” Lisa Lerner, Jennifer Medina and Reid J. Epstein, New York Times, March 24, 2024. Clearly, many people attribute their symptoms of dissatisfaction to the political or economic situation, rather than to aftereffects of the stress of the pandemic. **Misidentifying the source of one’s stress means that efforts to alleviate it are less than useless.** For example, one might believe that feelings of depression are due to difficulties paying bills, but these feelings may instead actually be due to losses that occurred during the pandemic. If so, you might successfully take care of your bills, only to find yourself still depressed for no obvious reason.

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