

# WPS Health Solutions: How to recognize the signs and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder

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**MADISON, Wis.—Feb. 8, 2023**—According to the [National Council for Behavioral Health](#), 70% of adults in the U.S. will experience at least one trauma in their lifetime. That's 223.4 million people. Over 90% of behavioral health clients have reported experiencing trauma.

Going through a traumatic event—be it a violent crime, seeing combat, a natural disaster, or any number of other occurrences—is not rare.

Trauma and how individuals react to it have been well-documented in historical records and literature, from Homer's eighth-century B.C. epic the "Iliad" to the writings of Shakespeare and Dickens. Nowadays, it is generally understood that *anyone* might be subjected to experience a genuine—and valid—physical or psychological response to a traumatic event.

Post-traumatic stress disorder can often be a result of exposure to severe trauma. About six out of every 100 people will have PTSD at some point in their lives, and 12 million adults in the U.S. are diagnosed in a given year.

Statistics from high-quality studies show that [PTSD is also prevalent in the veteran population](#). In a 2017 study involving 5,826 U.S. veterans, 13% were diagnosed with PTSD. This is more than twice the level of the general population (6%).

## What is trauma?

In order to be able to recognize signs and symptoms of post-traumatic stress, an important concept to understand is trauma.

What qualifies as “traumatic”? Everyone responds to stressful situations differently, which means the reality of [trauma is subjective](#) from individual to individual. To one person, something may be traumatic; in another person, it might trigger a less impactful stress response.

Most people who experience trauma won’t develop post-traumatic stress, but some still do. And for those who do, it’s important to recognize the signs and symptoms.

### **What does post-traumatic stress feel like?**

PTSD can trigger very real, and sometimes very debilitating, symptoms in those who are affected by it. According to the [National Institute of Mental Health](#) (NIMH), PTSD symptoms show up within three months after the trauma.

PTSD has around 20 different associated symptoms. Many of these overlap with [symptoms present for combat veterans](#). Only six are needed to be diagnosed, which means two people could have very different symptoms.

According to Dr. Ken Robbins, WPS Medical Director of Behavioral Health, some of the most common symptoms include:

- Re-experiencing traumatic events through flashbacks.
- Avoiding anything that reminds them of the event.
- Feeling “numb” or the inability to emotionally connect to things and others.
- Exhibiting signs of hyper-vigilance, like checking for intruders repetitively.
- Experiencing sleep, memory, and concentration issues.
- Self-medicating with drugs and/or alcohol.
- Having an aggravated startle response, like an extreme reaction to loud noises.
- Negative thoughts about self, the future, or the world.
- Feeling irritable or having angry outbursts.

### **How do I know if I am experiencing post-traumatic stress?**

To receive an [official diagnosis of PTSD](#), you must fit in the following description:

- You’ve experienced a trauma.
- You’ve had symptoms for at least a month.
- Your symptoms interfere with your daily life.
- Your symptoms aren’t caused by substance abuse.

- Your symptoms aren't caused by another medical problem.
- You have at least six of the PTSD symptoms.

If you feel like you are suicidal or in immediate danger, get help right away. Call 911.