

# Overcoming a Traumatic Event

Whether it is an incidence of violence, a workplace accident, or natural disaster; a trauma can leave you feeling unsafe and vulnerable.

Not all stressful events are traumatic and not everyone will respond in the same manner to the same stressful event. People respond differently to trauma and it is hard to predict who will react strongly and who will show little reaction to a particular event. Reactions to traumatic events are considered “**normal reactions to abnormal events**”.

Research indicates that the way in which you care for yourself during the first few days following a traumatic event will help to minimize the development of future psychological reactions to the event. Although it may feel abnormal, it is very normal for people to experience emotional ‘aftershocks’ following a traumatic event.

Some common responses are:

## Physical Reactions

- Insomnia
- Fatigue, hyperactivity or “nervous energy”
- Pain in the neck or back
- Headaches
- Heart palpitations or pains in the chest
- Dizzy spells
- Appetite changes

## Emotional Reactions

- Flashbacks or “reliving” the event
- Excessive jumpiness or tendency to be startled
- Irritability
- Anger
- Feelings of anxiety or helplessness
- Feeling vulnerable

Usually, the signs and symptoms of trauma will decrease with time. If you are concerned about your reaction, note the specific symptoms that worry you. For each symptom, note the:

- Duration—normally, trauma reactions will grow less intense and disappear within a few weeks.

- Intensity—if the reaction interferes with your ability to carry on your life normally, you may want to seek help.

### Caring for Yourself

- Avoid alcohol use. Especially for the first 24 hours. This is because alcohol works on the way in which you preserve memories of the traumatic event.
- Your brain needs the opportunity to deal with all aspects of the trauma so you will be less likely to be bothered by it.
- Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine. Caffeine is a stimulant and may prevent you from being able to relax.
- Talk about the trauma: thoughts, feelings and reactions to people you trust. Your mind needs to process what happened to help resolve your feelings.
- Practice healthy behaviors to enhance your ability to cope with excessive stress. Eat well balanced meals and get plenty of rest.
- Give yourself time to adjust. Accept that this may be a difficult time in your life.
- Allow yourself to feel sadness, loss, fear
- Physical exercise, along with relaxation may help relieve the physical stress.

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