

Normal Physical Responses after Trauma Exposure

People who have been exposed to stressful situation often have trauma stress reactions. This is a normal way for your body and mind to process and integrate this experience. These reactions can occur immediately after an event or several hours later and can last for several days or weeks depending on the situation.

- Trembling or shaking
- Pounding heart/ Rapid breathing
- Feeling on guard and constantly alert
- Feeling jumpy and easily startled
- Disturbing dreams/memories or flashbacks
- Difficulty sleeping or relaxing
- Stomach tightening or churning
- Feeling dizzy or faint
- Cold sweats
- Racing thoughts
- Lump in throat; feeling choked up
- Emotions: Crying, anger, grief, guilt, numb
- Feeling like everything has changed

Traumatic Stress Recovery Tips

Tip 1: Accept your feelings

Traumatic stress can lead to all kinds of difficult and unexpected emotions at unexpected times. These emotions are normal reactions to threats to safety and security. Accepting and allowing these feelings is necessary for healing.

Tip 2: Intentionally Re-Establish a Sense of Control

Trauma exposure is typically cause by situations that are outside of a person's control and threaten safety and security. Re-establishing a sense of control can help overcome feelings of fear, helplessness, and hopelessness—and even small acts can make a big difference.

Tip 3: Get Moving

It may be the last thing you feel like doing when you're experiencing traumatic stress, but exercising will burn off adrenaline and release feel-good endorphins. Physical activity performed mindfully can also rouse your nervous system from feeling helpless or stuck.

Tip 4: Reach Out to Others

You may be tempted to withdraw from friends and social activities following a traumatic event, but connecting face to face with other people is vital to recovery. The simple act of talking in person with another human can trigger hormones that relieve traumatic stress. Even just a brief exchange of kind words or a friendly look from another human being can help calm your nervous system.

Tip 5: Make stress reduction a priority

A certain amount of stress is normal, and can even be helpful, as you face the challenges in the aftermath of a difficult event. However, too much stress will get in the way of recovery. Use mindful breathing, practice structured routines, eat nourishing food, and make healthy lifestyle choices. Draw on your spirituality. Do activities that bring you joy: laugh, listen to music, go outside, appreciate nature, nurture gratitude, spend time with animals. Be gentle with yourself; don't over-extend. Recognize that this situation was physically and emotionally hard. Allow time, space, and care to recover.