
About.com Post Traumatic Stress (PTSD)

An Overview of PTSD Symptoms

By [Matthew Tull, PhD](#), About.com Updated: November 05, 2008

About.com Health's Disease and Condition content is reviewed by the [Medical Review Board](#)

Through years of research, 17 PTSD symptoms have been identified. These symptoms are listed in the 4th edition of the [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders \(or DSM-IV\)](#)¹. These 17 symptoms are divided into three separate clusters. The three PTSD symptom clusters, and the specific symptoms that make up these clusters, are described below.

Re-Experiencing Symptoms

- Frequently having upsetting thoughts or memories about a traumatic event.
- Having recurrent nightmares.
- Acting or feeling as though the traumatic event were happening again, sometimes called a "flashback."
- Having very strong feelings of distress when reminded of the traumatic event.
- Being physically responsive, such as experiencing a surge in your heart rate or sweating, to reminders of the traumatic event.

Avoidance Symptoms

- Making an effort to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations about the traumatic event.
- Making an effort to avoid places or people that remind you of the traumatic event.
- Having a difficult time remembering important parts of the traumatic event.
- A loss of interest in important, once positive, activities.
- Feeling distant from others.
- Experiencing difficulties having positive feelings, such as happiness or love.
- Feeling as though your life may be cut short.

Hyperarousal Symptoms

- Having a difficult time falling or staying asleep.
- Feeling more irritable or having outbursts of anger.
- Having difficulty concentrating.
- Feeling constantly "on guard" or like danger is lurking around every corner.
- Being "jumpy" or easily startled.

Do You Need All of These Symptoms for a Diagnosis of PTSD?

To be [diagnosed with PTSD](#)², a person does not need to have all these symptoms. In fact, it is quite rare that a person with PTSD would experience all the symptoms listed above. To receive a diagnosis of PTSD, you only need a certain number of symptoms from each cluster. Additional requirements for

the diagnosis also need to be assessed, such as how the person initially responded to the traumatic event, how long the symptoms have been experienced, and the extent with which those symptoms interfere with a person's life.

Source:

American Psychiatric Association (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, 4th ed.* Washington, DC: Author.

This About.com page has been optimized for print. To view this page in its original form, please visit: <http://ptsd.about.com/od/symptomsanddiagnosis/a/PTSDsymptoms.htm>
©2009 About.com, Inc., a part of [The New York Times Company](#). All rights reserved.

Links in this article:

1. <http://ptsd.about.com/od/glossary/g/DSMIVdef.htm>
2. <http://ptsd.about.com/od/symptomsanddiagnosis/a/PTSDdiagnosis.htm>