

PTSD

This leaflet has been given to you because you have been diagnosed with PTSD, or because you are suspected of suffering from PTSD.

[If you would rather read this information on your phone, you can go to www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/ptsd](https://www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/ptsd) (in Danish) or scan the QR code with your phone.



What is PTSD?

PTSD is short for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

It is a mental disorder that can be developed if you have been exposed to or witnessed a very violent or life-threatening situation, in which you may have felt strong fear, horror or helplessness.

Examples include natural disasters, rape, sexual assault during childhood, violence, accidents, torture and war.

Some have been in actual mortal danger, while others have had the feeling of being in mortal danger. What matters is how the brain reacted and perceived the danger.

How do you know if you have PTSD?

After a violent experience, it is quite normal to react emotionally and physically as well as being affected by the experience for a while. This does not mean that PTSD is present.

PTSD is diagnosed when symptoms have persisted for one month at the earliest.

What are the symptoms of PTSD?

There are three main groups of symptoms that characterise PTSD:

- Flashback
- Avoidance
- Increased alertness.

Flashback

PTSD is characterised by severe flashbacks of the trauma, which are repeated and involuntary memories of the trauma. These flashbacks can occur in different ways:

- **Intrusive memories**

Many PTSD-affected people find that thoughts about the violent experience continue to involuntarily arise. They can't help but think about what has happened, and many have the feeling that they can't control their thoughts, which continue to revolve around the violent experience.

- **Flashbacks**

Flashbacks are typically stray images or small films of what happened where it feels like being back in the situation. You sense, for instance, the same smells, sounds, tastes or sights as during the trauma. Similarly, sensory impressions reminiscent of the trauma can trigger flashbacks or severe discomfort.

- **Nightmares**

Many PTSD-affected people have nightmares of the traumatic experience, which interferes with sleep in the form of awakenings so the affected may be afraid to fall asleep.

Many also experience anxiety symptoms that are triggered when reminded of the experience.

The typical anxiety symptoms are:

- Trembling hands or body
- Muscle tension
- Sweating
- Palpitation
- Chest pain
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath

Avoidance

When you have PTSD, you often try to avoid what might remind you of the violent experience. There are two types of avoidance:

- **Mental and emotional avoidance**

You try to push away your thoughts and feelings about the trauma and avoid talking about what happened. You can become so good at pushing your emotions away that you feel emotionally paralysed, because you don't feel negative or positive emotions.

- **Behavioural avoidance and avoidance in daily life**

It can be the avoidance of people, places, situations, and things that remind you of the trauma. As a result, your life becomes more restricted, socially as well as professionally. You may also tend to keep busy all the time with, for example, work, but over time it will be difficult to maintain.

Increased alertness and mental hypersensitivity

Having PTSD, the body is on alert. You may have the feeling of being constantly on guard, and you may have a tendency to be easily startled from loud noises or sudden movements.

As a consequence, many scan their surroundings and need a high level of control. Many people experience sleep problems, and irritability and outbursts of anger as well as concentration and memory problems are frequent issues, too.

In addition to anxiety, many PTSD-affected people experience symptoms of depression, and some develop addictions in an attempt to avoid thoughts and feelings related to the trauma and to be able to cope with social situations. Many also experience uncomfortable emotions such as shame and guilt. Suicidal ideas are not uncommon.

Is PTSD treatable?

When you're at your worst, you may find that it seems impossible to get better. But it is possible to treat PTSD so that the traumatic memories trouble you less in your daily life, and you are able to do many of the things you could do before the traumatic event.

How do we treat PTSD in the Capital Region of Denmark's Mental Health Services?

PTSD is a treatable disorder, and it's possible to either recover fully or find a way to live with the disorder so that it does not control your life.

When in a PTSD course of treatment, you will often be offered the following:

- Psychoeducation (learning about the disorder)
- Trauma-focused psychotherapy
- Medical treatment.

Lessons on PTSD (psychoeducation)

It's easier to live with PTSD and have it treated if you have a good understanding of the symptoms and the disorder. That is why lessons on PTSD is an important part of your treatment. Knowledge about one's own illness is called 'psychoeducation' in technical jargon.

If you know the symptoms and how you usually react in different situations, it's easier to deal with the reactions in a good way – either by yourself or with your relatives and other supportive persons.

Trauma-focused psychotherapy

The most effective form of PTSD treatment is trauma-focused psychotherapy. The treatment consists of conversations with a trained therapist – often a doctor or psychologist – where you talk about what you have experienced.

To many, it can be difficult to talk about as one of the symptoms of PTSD is to avoid memories and feelings about the violent experience. But when you put your experiences into words one step at a time, you slowly begin to understand that you are no longer in danger and that the experience is a thing of the past.

Gradually, you will also begin to reclaim your life by breaking the habit of avoiding situations that remind you of the trauma, directly or indirectly, but are quite harmless. This will reduce your anxiety.

Medical treatment

For a period of time, it may be necessary to treat some of the anxiety symptoms with medication. Anti-anxiety medication reduces the feeling of anxiety or worry. The medication can moderate both physical and psychological symptoms and has a generally calming effect.

How do I get treatment for PTSD?

If you suspect that you suffer from PTSD, contact your doctor, who will then decide whether you should be referred to either the Capital Region of Denmark's Mental Health Services or a therapist elsewhere.

You can always go to a psychiatric emergency department if you need urgent help. [The nearest psychiatric emergency department can be found on www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/akut](http://www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/akut) (in Danish) or by scanning the QR code with your phone.



Good advice for relatives

Being a relative of someone with PTSD can be challenging. Many say that they are unsure of what to do to help. The best thing you can do as a relative is to support the person in getting professional help.

It can be difficult to distinguish between the person close to you being 'just' shaken after a difficult incident and actual signs of PTSD. A professional with experience can help determine that.

Listen and ask questions

You provide the best support by listening and being present to the extent needed. Ask questions instead of giving advice. During anxiety attacks, the most important thing is to calm the person down so that the situation calms down as well.

As a relative, you may tend to take over many of the person's daily chores, such as shopping and driving. It can be necessary at times, but as a starting point, it is better to support the person in doing it themselves or doing it with them.

Relatives, too, may need to talk to a professional, a good friend or someone else in a similar situation. It's good to maintain activities that are meaningful and energise you.

More knowledge and counselling

Psykiatriguiden – overview for patients and relatives

In Psykiatriguiden, we have gathered all relevant information about mental illnesses, types of treatment and treatment programmes offered by the mental health services of the Capital Region of Denmark. You can also read about being a relative of a person with a mental illness.

[Find Psykiatriguiden \(in Danish\) at www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/psykiatriguiden](http://www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/psykiatriguiden) or by scanning the QR code with your phone.



Living with mental illness

[You can find specific tools designed to help you in your everyday life at www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/hverdagen](http://www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/hverdagen) (in Danish) or by scanning the QR code with your phone.



Counselling from PsykInfo

At PsykInfo in the Capital Region of Denmark, nurses with experience from the mental health services offer telephone or personal counselling to both patients and their relatives. [You can read more at www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/Psykinfo](http://www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/Psykinfo) (in Danish) or call 38 64 13 00. You can also scan the QR code with your phone.

