



# The post-traumatic stress



**Following events such as the terrorist attacks in France and Belgium, many people have been directly or indirectly affected by a traumatic situation and have developed symptoms of post-traumatic stress.**

## Definition

Post-traumatic stress is an intense emotional reaction, secondary to a traumatic event that is outside the realm of usual experiences.

To speak about post-traumatic stress, several elements must be present:

- the confrontation with a real and significant traumatic event; the presence of intrusive symptoms (the post-traumatic stress is relived in one or more ways); the presence of avoidance symptoms; the presence of a neurovegetative syndrome.

**However, two notions are necessary to generate post-traumatic stress:**

1. The individual has experienced, witnessed, or been confronted with an event or events in which individuals:
  - have died or been seriously injured;
  - have been threatened with death or serious injury;
  - have seen their physical integrity or that of others threatened.
2. The individual's reaction to the event was characterized by intense fear, a feeling of helplessness, or horror.

## Who is affected?

Being a witness to or a victim of a traumatic event does not necessarily mean that post-traumatic stress will occur. It is difficult to predict who will be affected. Some people may be exposed to horrific events multiple times and never suffer, while others may be exposed only once and develop post-traumatic stress.

## Treatment

In the presence of post-traumatic stress, professional care is necessary.

The first step will be to listen to and support the victim.

« Support for people suffering from post-traumatic stress is very important. In emergency situations, there is no specific therapy to implement other than supporting the victim » recalls Dr. Aurore Sabouraud Seguin, a psychiatrist at the Institute of Victimology in Paris.

In some cases, medication may be considered if symptoms persist, but medication is not always the solution in the early days.

In this care, the professional must accompany the patient in a mission of « psycho-education », that is, explaining the symptoms and evolution of this disorder to reassure the patient and put words to what they are feeling.

## The role of loved ones

Having a social network around oneself, that is, being well surrounded, is very important when suffering from post-traumatic stress. It is essential to avoid leaving the victim alone as much as possible, but not to overwhelm them either. The key for loved ones will be to be present and listen.

## The evolution of post-traumatic stress disorder

This condition can last for several days, several weeks, or even several months. However, if the symptoms persist for three months after the stressful event, it will be considered a chronic disorder, which will require therapy with a psychiatrist or psychologist.

Sleep disorders are often the entry point for medical consultation. Sedatives or hypnotics may be prescribed for a short period. Antidepressants are considered the first-line treatment: they sometimes allow the discontinuation of sedatives.

Finally, several other classes of medications may be used if the patient presents severe symptoms. These pharmacological treatments are accompanied by specialized teams: doctors, psychiatrists, and therapists.



The most recommended psychotherapeutic interventions for post-traumatic stress include behavioral therapy. This approach aims to modify the person's attitude by reducing avoidance behaviors and provides strategies to reduce anxious symptoms.

In addition, a person can improve their condition with medication alone or with psychotherapy alone.

However, psychotherapy is scientifically recognized as the most effective treatment for post-traumatic stress.

Currently, scientific studies are focused on evaluating recognized pharmacological and psychological treatments as well as developing new approaches that could improve these treatments.

These studies also aim to shed light on indicators that would allow for better prediction of treatment response.

## Conclusion

When an individual is confronted with a post-traumatic stress situation, it is essential to take charge quickly and support them.

It is important to remember that we are all susceptible to post-traumatic stress, that it is desirable to talk about the event, and not to force forgetting.