

YOU ARE NOT GOING CRAZY!

Acute Stress: Reactions after a Traumatic Experience

After a sudden loss, injury or complicated illness, a person may go through a period of about a month where they experience feelings of fear, helplessness or horror as well as some physical symptoms. This is known as Acute Stress Disorder. These feelings of stress and sadness are to be expected during such times and usually go away after a person has had a chance to feel better about themselves and the future. If symptoms last longer than a month, a person may be developing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and may need long-term counseling.

Acute Stress Disorder includes:

1. Feelings of jumpiness or panic.
2. Feelings of numbness, being in a daze or in shock over what has happened.
3. Feelings of despair and hopelessness.
4. Forgetfulness about parts of the tragedy or things that need to get done.
5. Difficulty concentrating while trying to do other things (i.e., reading or watching TV).
6. Difficulty falling or staying asleep.
7. Nightmares during sleep.
8. Daydreaming and thinking about the event incessantly as well as things that could, should or might have been different.
9. Loss of interest in work, socializing or other activities previously enjoyed.
10. Difficulty resolving issues related to the tragedy or in obtaining necessary resources.

A wide range of physical symptoms may occur, such as:

1. Headaches.
2. Muscle and joint pain, twitches or shakiness.
3. Stomach ache, diarrhea, indigestion, heartburn, frequent urination.
4. Sweating, dry mouth, cold hands.
5. Fatigue and irritability.
6. Substance abuse.
7. Sexual dysfunction.

There are several ways to deal with acute stress:

1. Talk to friends, family members or a member of the clergy about your feelings. Join a peer support network that can understand and share experiences.
2. Express feelings and memories by writing in journals or letters, or use creative expression such as drawing, painting, sculpting, quilting, singing, dancing, etc.
3. Remember to use your sense of humor; know it's okay to laugh.
4. Ensure that you are eating well-balanced and nutritious meals, drinking water and getting exercise. Avoid alcohol and non-prescribed drugs.
5. If the tragedy has disrupted daily routine, re-establish that routine as soon as possible.
6. List all the issues you need to address following the tragedy and deal with them one at a time. Avoid making any major life changes immediately. Allow time to deal with issues and other people's needs.
7. Get help from reliable people who can advise you on legal and financial issues, who can help with household chores and who can provide comfort.
8. Remember to involve children in age-appropriate activities and ensure that they are emotionally and physically cared for as well.
9. If symptoms last longer than one month, seek professional counseling or contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).



Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists
“Recognizing Standards Of Excellence In Response, Treatment & Services”

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