

Suggestions for Dealing with Post-Trauma Symptoms

Sleep Issues

- Try going to sleep at a regular sleep time each night.
- Eating turkey, bananas, or pasta and drinking cold milk. These are all sleep inducers.
- Don't eat too much as it makes it harder to fall asleep.
- Don't use a sleep aid for prolonged periods of time as they lose their effectiveness after two weeks. Sleep aids with antihistamines should be used with caution since excessive use of these medicines can cause depression in some users.
- Exercise earlier rather than later in the day. IF you exercise after 6pm, your metabolism is up, and it becomes harder to fall asleep.
- "Mid-morning awakening" usually occurs around 2-3am. This is a low point in your sleep rhythm. Use an orange or red light in your room instead of white. White light activates your brain and awakens it. Try to distract yourself (focus on your tongue and try to relax it, or find something meaningless or mindless to focus on). If after one hour you are still awake, get up, turn a white light on for one hour and read. This is how long it takes for your body's natural sleep rhythm to reset itself. Do not watch television, as this further awakens your system.
- "Twilighting" is when you wake up and fall back to sleep repeatedly every thirty to forty-five minutes. Avoid this as it is more fatiguing to your body than if you merely get up as described above.
- Avoid alcohol as it causes a "rebound" two to three hours after falling asleep. It causes you to awaken and makes it more difficult to fall back to sleep.

Obsessive Thoughts

- Don't fight them; the harder you try not to think about it, the more you do and it only makes them stronger. Instead, replace the image in your mind. Prior to the need, develop an image (such as a stop sign). Also create an image of a place that you feel happy/comfortable/safe. Think of at least seven items for this image. Then when you are experiencing an intrusive thought, immediately bring up the image of the stop sign and then move immediately to your safe places. This is called "extinguishing".
- Utilize the rubber band technique. Wear a rubber band around your wrist. When the intrusive thought occurs, snap the rubber band. The discomfort may help to distract yourself from the thought.

Memory

- Crises produce changes in immediate and short-term memory. Utilize writing lists or instructions or audio taped reminders to aid with forgetfulness.



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Breathing to Release Tension

The Relaxing Sigh

During the day, you probably catch yourself sighing or yawning. This is generally a sign that you are not getting enough oxygen. Sighing and yawning are your body's way of remedying the situation. A sigh is often accompanied by a sense that things are not quite as they should be and by a feeling of tension. Since a sigh does release a bit of tension, you can practice sighing as a means of relaxing.

1. Sit or stand up tall.
2. Sigh deeply, letting out a sound of deep relief as the air rushes out of your lungs.
3. Don't think about inhaling – just let the air come in naturally.
4. Take 8 to 12 of these relaxing sighs and let yourself experience the feeling of relaxation. Repeat this whenever you feel the need for it.

Letting Go of Tension

1. Sit comfortably in a chair with your feet on the floor.
2. Breathe in deeply, into your abdomen, and say to yourself, "Breathe in relaxation."
3. Let yourself pause before you exhale.
4. Breathe out from your abdomen and say to yourself, "Breathe out tension."
5. Pause before you inhale.
6. Use each inhalation as a moment to become more aware of any tension in your body.
7. Use each exhalation as an opportunity to let go of tension.
8. You may find it helpful to use your imagination to picture or feel the relaxation entering and the tension leaving your body.

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Reactions to Traumatic Events

An emotional reaction to a traumatic event is quite natural. Many people feel “strange” or unlike themselves for varying periods after events of this kind, often lasting from one to six weeks. The most common responses to traumatic events are:

- Anxiety about the possible recurrence of the event or similar events.
- Emotional distress caused by events or objects that remind you of the traumatic event.
- Confusion, difficulty in concentration, memory problems, or an inability to estimate time accurately.
- Flashbacks of the event that may be visual or may take the form of reliving the event emotionally.
- Temporary mood swings, general changes in temperament, or irritability.
- Sleep problem and/or nightmares.
- Feeling depressed, detached, or estranged from others.
- A change in appetite or eating patterns.
- Shortness of temper, angry feeling, or a lack of patience with yourself or others.
- Diminished interest in significant activities (work, social, or family).



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