

## INFORMATION ON POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

A post-traumatic stress disorder may appear suddenly following a shocking event in life. War, torture, illtreatment, a severe traffic accident or a catastrophe like an earthquake, a flood or a hurrican may be one of those events. In those situations an individual or his/her close relative is in mortal danger and he/she is not able to control the situation. A strong feeling of helplessness, fear and horror are often linked to those situations.

When a person is suffering of post-traumatic stress disorder, the shocking experience often comes back to mind and causes anxiety. Repeated nightmares are also common. Sometimes, the same events can be lived again and again in a very strong way and they can comprise unreal sensations.

A person suffering of post-traumatic stress disorder feels with strong anxiety the things reminding him of his/her trauma and he/she tries to avoid them. That can greatly limit his/her every day life. Sometimes, the person has difficulties to remember events connected to the post-traumatic experience. They seem to be swept away from his/her mind. The disorder may also comprise the difficulty to be together with other people and thus, the person suffering of post-traumatic stress disorder may occasionally feel the others as strangers and frightening. He/she has often difficulties to have warm feelings and can find the whole life more desperate than usually. Sometimes even usual things such as crossing a street or taking a meal may be difficult.

Difficulties to sleep are often connected to a post-traumatic stress disorder. The person suffering of the disorder may have difficulties to fall asleep or his/her sleep may be disconnected. Problems of concentration and irritability are common. The person is often stressed and on his/her guard against the environment even though it is no more

necessary. A feeling of being followed may be connected to it. He/she can also get angry more easily than usually and he/she can become frightened by loud noise or voices. Sometimes a post-traumatic stress disorder may cause physical problems such as stomach and breast aching or a headache. Also various phases of depression are common in case of a post-traumatic stress disorder.

The above described symptoms are common following a difficult post-traumatic experience. It is question of a post-traumatic stress disorder when the symptoms last over a month after the the experience itself. From time to time, the symptoms may disappear and then come back back in a certain phase of life. A post-traumatic stress disorder may handicap the coping with everyday life and it may also disturb relations with others.

How is a post-traumatic stress disorder treated ?

A post-traumatic stress disorder is a long lasting disorder and its treatment requires much time. The goal of the treatment is to reduce excessive anxiety and fears. With time, sleeping will become easier. One of the aims of treatment is also to facilitate the recovery of the capacity to cope with everyday life and to better control one's behaviour as well as the normalization of human relations.

The therapy of discussions aims to clarify the nature of the disorder and the consequent handicaps in everyday life. In a longer and more intensive therapy, discussions also deal more in details with the post-traumatic events and the thoughts and feelings related to those events. The aim of discussions is to discharge the psychic burden due to the post-traumatic events, which take energy and disturb life. One may sometimes feel discussions oppressive and have the feeling that they increase the symptoms, but often they help on long term.

It is also good to exercise coping with oppressive situations by taking a bus or meeting certain people. Various ways of relaxation can also reduce excessive tension. The same, physical exercises may be useful. Sometimes physiotherapy also helps to control the symptoms.

## Pharmacotherapy

Medical treatment aims to reduce the symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder such as anxiety, difficulties to sleep and return to mind of post-traumatic events. Concerning the treatment of a post-traumatic stress disorder, usually the same medicaments are used for it as for the treatment of depression. They are safe and do not produce addiction. At the beginning of medical treatment, there may be some side effects such as weariness, nausea, stomach aching or sweating. Generally the secondary effects disappear in a few days and medical treatment can be followed. The benefic effects of medical treatment appear only several weeks later. If medical treatment is helping, it should be continued during several months, even years. It has not been noticed that long lasting use of these medicaments would be harmful.

Sometimes medicaments reducing anxiety and helping to get sleep are used in medical treatment on a temporary basis. Usually, they are taken only during a short period of time. If the symptoms are very complicated, psychotic medicaments can be useful. As to any changes in medical treatment or the secondary effects which may appear, it is good to discuss about them with the attending doctor or nurse who can also give more information on post-traumatic stress disorder and its treatment.

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