

Facts about addiction and PTSD

People with alcohol and other drug dependencies often suffer from co-occurring mental health illnesses.

Mental health and recovery

Individuals with untreated mental health issues may experience more difficulty in recovery.

For some people alcohol and drug use and withdrawal can cause symptoms of anxiety. In these cases the anxiety symptoms may be substance induced and the symptoms will subside with prolonged abstinence. For others the symptoms of anxiety persist and may even worsen with prolonged abstinence thus making recovery more difficult. For these individuals, treatment options are available.

What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a debilitating condition that can develop after exposure to a terrifying event. The event that causes PTSD may be something that threatened the person's life or someone close to him or her.

Traumatic events that can trigger PTSD include violent personal assault such as rape or mugging, natural or human caused disasters, accidents, or military combat.

Whatever the source of the problem, some people with PTSD repetitively remember the trauma in the form of nightmares and disturbing flashbacks. They may also experience sleep problems, feel detached or numb, or be easily startled. They may lose interest in things they used to enjoy and have trouble feeling affectionate. They may feel irritable or aggressive and may even be violent.

Things that remind them of the trauma may be very distressing, which could lead them to avoid certain places or situations that bring back those memories. Anniversaries of the traumatic event may also be very difficult.¹

How common is PTSD?

About 3.6% of United States adults ages 18 to 54 (5.2 million people) have PTSD. About 30% of the men and women who have spent time in war zones experience PTSD.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is diagnosed only if the symptoms last more than a month. In those who develop PTSD, symptoms usually begin within three months of the trauma and the length of the illness varies.

Some people recover within six months; others show symptoms that last much longer. Occasionally PTSD does not show up until years after the traumatic event. Once PTSD occurs, the severity and length of the illness vary.²

What treatments are available for PTSD?

Cognitive behavioral therapy, group therapy, and other types of individual psychotherapy have been found to be effective. Studies have also shown that medications help ease symptoms of depression and anxiety.^{2,3} It is important to discuss medication options with a professional knowledgeable about substance dependency because some medications can be addictive.

About Mental Health Services

Mental health services at Hazelden are part of the internationally recognized Hazelden Foundation. Hazelden, a national nonprofit organization founded in 1949, helps people reclaim their lives from the disease of addiction. Built on decades of knowledge and experience, Hazelden's comprehensive approach to addiction addresses the full range of patient, family, and professional needs, including treatment and continuing care for youth and adults, research, higher learning, public education and advocacy, and publishing.

For more information about mental health services at Hazelden, please call 800-257-7800.

References

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