



Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Trauma has become an all too familiar part of our lives in South Africa and barely a day goes by without some news event or even personal experience of trauma. The impact of trauma can be severe and we often neglect to recognise that trauma can have a long lasting emotional and psychological impact on us.

One such psychological consequence is Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a psychological condition that occurs in response to a traumatic event. The event may be violent personal assault, car accident, burglary, hijacking, rape, non-natural death of friend or family member, or even a natural disaster.

The causes of PTSD are not known but specific psychological, genetic (hereditary), physical and social factors may contribute to the development thereof. PTSD alters the body's response to trauma, affecting levels of stress hormones and other chemicals in the nervous system. Prior exposure to trauma may increase the risk of developing PTSD. People with a strong social support system are less likely to develop PTSD than those without support.

Diagnosis of the disorder often only occurs months after the event and often the problem has already had a significant impact on a person's personality, behaviour, relationships and work performance.

| Symptoms of PTSD: |

- Recurring, distressing memories of the event
- Recurring dreams of the event
- Flashback episodes when the event seems to be recurring
- Inability to recall important aspects of the trauma
- Lack of interest in activities
- Feelings of detachment
- Sense of foreshortened life
- Psychic or emotional "numbing"
- Restricted range of affect/mood (response to feelings)
- Irritability or outbursts of anger
- Sleeping difficulties
- Difficulty concentrating
- Exaggerated startle response
- Hyper-vigilance (over-excessive cautiousness)
- Sense of guilt about the event (survivor guilt)
- Paleness/pallor
- Palpitations (heartbeat sensations)
- Headache
- Fever
- Fainting
- Dizziness
- Agitation

The best treatment for PTSD is psychological counselling and at times, appropriate medication. However, disorders such as PTSD can be prevented by receiving appropriate counselling shortly after any perceived traumatic event. It is with this fact in mind that Profmed introduced the Post-trauma Management Benefit.

This service is available to all Profmed members and is provided by ICAS, an international company with more than 1400 psychologists in South Africa.

To access the service, all you need to do is follow these steps:

1. Contact **0800 611 298** from within South Africa, or +27 11 459 2218 from within the SADC region.
2. Provide your membership number to the psychologist. In the event that you are unable to remember your number, details will be verified at a later stage.
3. Telephonic counselling will be provided immediately and you will be referred to a psychologist in your region for two face-to-face counselling sessions.
4. Should you require additional sessions, these can be arranged privately with the same psychologist.
5. In the event that during the trauma, you fear possible exposure to HIV, you can contact Optipharm for medical treatment on 0860 90 60 90.