

Wellness Bulletin

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Could you get PTSD from your pandemic experience? The long-term mental health effects of coronavirus

Experiencing intense flashbacks, nightmares, irritability, anger, and fear? In the face of a traumatic event like the Covid-19 pandemic, it's common to feel this way.

While many people associate post-traumatic stress disorder with something like war, it's a chronic psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, such as a serious accident, terrorist attack or a physical assault.

After the SARS outbreak in 2003, both healthcare workers and people who were self-quarantined exhibited symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The Covid-19 pandemic could have a similar effect, according to experts. Even if you aren't clinically diagnosed with PTSD, you may have a strong emotional reaction to the trauma of Covid-19 that can last long after an incident.

“When we think about traumatic events, it's not just what the event is, it's really your interpretation and what the event causes for you,” Luana Marques, clinical psychologist and associate professor in the department of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and president of the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, tells CNBC Make It.

For example, healthcare workers providing frontline services, as well as people who have lost loved ones or jobs due to the disease may be at greater risk for developing long-term difficulties. Those who struggle with other mental health conditions, such as anxiety or depression, or who have a prior history of trauma, may be at increased risk of more ongoing distress.

Even if you aren't directly affected by Covid-19, the pandemic has been a significant stressor on everyone's lives, Alyssa Rheingold, clinical psychologist and professor at the Medical University of South Carolina who specializes in trauma, tells CNBC Make It. Indeed, there could be long-term consequences to the stress, anxiety, and fear that has overwhelmed the globe for months.

While it's impossible to predict what life will look like in the future, there are some things we can do in the present to “flatten the mental health wave,” Marques says. Here's what experts say you should be aware of how to prevent future issues:

Be aware of symptoms...

There are a number of symptoms that people can experience after a traumatic incident, including: invasive thoughts like nightmares or upsetting memories and flashbacks, being really stressed out or irritable, having trouble sleeping, Rheingold says. People often feel hyper-vigilant or have trouble concentrating. They may avoid thinking about an incident as a way of coping, too.

To be diagnosed with PTSD, someone would have a certain number of all these symptoms over a long period

of time. But even if you're not diagnosed with full-blown PTSD, people can experience those symptoms after a traumatic or stressful event, she adds.

... and how long they last

It's normal to have an intense emotional response to a significant threat or traumatic incident like a pandemic, Marques says. But typically, symptoms tend to naturally recover over time.

"So, there's a huge bump in symptoms right away, and then about four months out of the trauma those symptoms get better on their own," she says.

However, sometimes the symptoms don't get better with time.

If you're still having symptoms that interfere with your daily life (meaning you feel paralyzed or like you can't do your job or sleep), then it's worth getting help from a therapist or mental health professional, she says. In fact, timing is key; PTSD can't be diagnosed until one month after a traumatic incident, Michele Bedard-Gilligan, associate professor at the University of Washington, who specializes in trauma, tells CNBC Make It.

Use the acronym 'TEB'

It stands for: thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. "People should be watching what they're saying to themselves, and how that's making them feel and what they do," Marquez says.

For example, if you spend all day ruminating that you're going to get sick or lose your job, then you might go home and drink to feel better and wake up feeling worse the next day.

If your thought patterns tend to be "black and white or catastrophic," that's not a good sign.

"That leads to distorted thinking and dysfunctional behavior," she says. Instead, find a coping mechanism that can "anchor" you, like calling a friend or exercising.

Unplug from the news

One of the best coping strategies when it comes to trauma is "making media consumption incredibly intentional," Bedard-Gilligan says. If the news is making you feel bad or negative, stop and ask yourself: Is this helping me? What is this doing for me?

Studies suggest that simply watching news coverage of a traumatic event can trigger acute stress symptoms, Marques says. "You should unplug from the news a little bit and try something that slows you down," she says. "Anything you can do to cool off your brain right now is really helpful."

Remember resilience

"Most people are incredibly resilient, even those of us who are feeling really distressed or struggling right now," Bedard-Gilligan says.

Although it might feel difficult at the moment, many people have great coping mechanisms and social supports that will help get through this, she adds. Maintaining the strategies that you know tend to work is one way you can make sure you're not suffering months down the road.

However, if you notice that your normal coping strategies aren't working, or you're so anxious that it gets in your way of being able to do anything you enjoy, "that's probably where support is needed," she says.

Source: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/17/long-term-mental-health-ptsd-effects-of-covid-19-pandemic-explained.html>

More information at: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20355967>

The Great Outdoors – Fresh Air and Fun

<https://thecenterfordiscovery.org/safe-indoor-and-outdoor-activities-for-families-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/>



At TCFD, we have the great privilege of being located in a beautiful, rural environment. If you have access to the great outdoors, even just a backyard, here's a few ideas to enjoy the fresh air:

- Decorate a shoebox and go on an adventure collecting favorite rocks, acorns, twigs, pinecones. You can even make animals from the treasured pinecones and acorns with pompoms, googly eyes, construction paper, feathers, pipe cleaners, and more.
- Go on a botany adventure! With a notebook and crayons/pencils in hand, try to draw local plants and observe what's already budding.
- Collect rocks and categorize or paint them! Here at TCFD, we have a painted rock garden with inspirational pictures and sayings.
- Play balloon tennis. No racquets? No problem. Use your hands, which is great for hand-eye coordination.
- Preparing the garden for planting – rake, weed and plant a vegetable garden.
- Start a weeklong fitness challenge – indoors and out – jump rope, sit-ups, pushups, etc. Team up – kids versus adults to see who has the muscle!
- Egg race: a few spoons and a few hard-boiled eggs and a relay! Plus a perfect protein snack when you are done!
- Bubbles, Bubbles, Bubbles! Everyone loves bubbles. Make giant wands and homemade bubbles mixed with some dishwasher detergent. Chase them. Pop them. Marvel at the rainbow of color in each! Check out a fun tutorial here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITQIgVFvFYE>.

COD FISH TACOS

PREP TIME: 20 mins **COOK TIME:** 10 mins
TOTAL TIME: 30 mins **YIELD:** 4 SERVINGS

INGREDIENTS

Fish:

4 pieces 4 oz each skinless firm white fish such as cod, (or snapper fillet, mahi mahi), fresh is best, if frozen thawed

1/2 teaspoon cumin

1/2 teaspoons kosher salt

3/4 teaspoons lime chili seasoning, such as Tajin Classic

For The Sauce (make 1/2 cup)

1/4 cup fat free Greek Yogurt

3 tablespoons light mayonnaise

1 tablespoon lime juice

1-2 tablespoons water, to thin

3/4 teaspoon chili-lime seasoning salt, such as Tajin Classic

1/8 teaspoon kosher salt



For The Slaw

1/4 cup chopped cilantro

1 cup white cabbage, sliced

1 cup red cabbage, sliced

1/4 cup shredded carrots

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 tablespoon lime juice

1/4 teaspoon kosher salt

8 corn tortillas, charred on the open

Serving: 2tacos, Calories: 342kcal, Carbohydrates: 38g, Protein: 35g, Fat: 9.5g, Saturated Fat: 1.5g, Cholesterol: 56.5mg, Sodium: 638.5mg, Fiber: 4.5g, Sugar: 2.5g

