



What is Medical Trauma?

Overview

- ✓ Medical trauma is emotional and physical responses to pain, injury, serious illness, medical procedures and frightening treatment experiences.
- ✓ There are lots of different experiences related to illness, injury or medical treatment that can be difficult, uncomfortable or frightening.
 - A sudden, life-threatening illness or injury and the related treatment
 - Shock and feeling out of control when receiving a scary diagnosis
 - Life changing complications or problems during or after a medical procedure
 - Unexpected medical intervention such as needing an emergency intervention
 - Things about the hospital like constant noise, frequent medical checks, and staff disrupting sleep
 - Seeing frightening images or having frightening thoughts due to **delirium** while in the hospital
 - **Delirium** is when you become confused, cannot think clearly and are not aware of your surroundings. It happens suddenly and can last for hours or days. It can be caused by medication, infection, lack of sleep or another medical reason.

What Are the Signs I'm Having A Response to A Medical Trauma?

- ✓ After a medical trauma, you may have a **trauma response**. This is how you react to the event.
- ✓ Many people experience a trauma response right after the trauma and feel better over time. They may also experience grief. Each person has their own response.
- ✓ Some people experience posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a mental health problem that causes anxiety or stress after a traumatic event.
- ✓ **If you have PTSD, you may:**
 1. **Keep going over the details of the trauma in your head.** Memories of the event can come back at any time. Something you see, hear, smell, touch or taste may cause you to feel the same feelings you did when the event happened.
 2. **Avoid things, places and people that remind you of the event.** You may not want to go back to the hospital, see your doctor again or take medications. When you avoid uncomfortable thoughts and feelings, it can make your symptoms worse.
 3. **Have changes in the way you think and feel.** The way you think about yourself and others may change because of the trauma. It may be hard to trust medical providers.
 4. **Feel very nervous.** You may feel "on edge," have a hard time falling asleep or trouble controlling pain. You may suddenly become angry or irritable with yourself or others.

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How to Cope with Medical Trauma

Overview

- ✓ To take care of a physical wound, you might be asked to change bandages or take medications. Some of this physical healing can be uncomfortable, but it helps you heal over time. This is also true for emotional healing. Talking, thinking and feeling your emotions about the event can be painful, but it is an important step to healing.
- ✓ There are important things you and your loved ones can do after a medical trauma to feel better and help you recover.

Ideas for How to Cope

Talk about what happened. It is common to want to avoid talking or thinking about what happened.

- ✓ One of the best ways to relieve difficult feelings and worries is to share them with someone you trust and feel supported by.
- ✓ Talking can help make feelings and thoughts feel less intense. It can also help you understand your feelings and thoughts when you talk to someone else about them.

Use deep breathing. Deep breathing can help you manage your feelings. Slow, deep breathing can also help reduce pain, slow your heart rate and lower blood pressure.

You can follow these steps:

1. Sit or lay down in a comfortable place.
2. Put your hand on your stomach.
3. Breathe in for four seconds. Breathe in deeply enough so that your hand begins to rise. Imagine filling your stomach up with air like a balloon.
4. Then, breathe out for four seconds.
5. End the exercise when you feel more relaxed, calm or less emotional.

Take time to adjust. After leaving the hospital, it can take time to get back into a regular routine. Make time to do things you enjoy, take things one day at a time and return to your normal schedule as much as possible. Remember it will take time to adjust and parts of your life may need to change temporarily or permanently.

Seek help. Most people have some reactions after a medical trauma. However, these reactions get better over weeks or months. If you continue to have lots of negative feelings and thoughts that are staying the same or are getting worse, seek out professional guidance from a doctor or mental health professional.

Mental health apps. Apps like Virtual Hope Box, PTSD Coach, Family Coach, Move Forward, CBT-I Coach, Headspace and Woebot can also help you learn new coping skills but should not replace a mental health professional.

