



## What is PTSD?

PTSD is a mental health disorder that is triggered by an incident that a person may find terrifying. The individual fails to recover from the incident and continues to “relive” it in their mind. People with PTSD feel frightened and anxious even when they are not in danger.

## What are the symptoms of PTSD?

Flashbacks of the incident or nightmares which cause severe distress and anxiety



Avoiding activities or places which remind you of the trauma



Emotional numbness, feelings of hopelessness and negativity about yourself



Easily startled, irritable and aggressive behaviour



May have difficulty concentrating or sleeping



Most people who experience trauma have difficulty with adjustment in the period following the incident. However with time and maybe some assistance, they learn how to cope. If these symptoms persist and interfere with basic daily activities, this may be PTSD.

PTSD symptoms can start within a month following the incident or up to several years later. Irrespective of when they start, they are debilitating in nature, making it nearly impossible to pursue your usual social activities.



## How is it diagnosed?

We all react to trauma differently. While some people may bounce back, others may go on experiencing avoidance, being hyper-vigilant at all times and reliving the experience for prolonged periods of time. It is important to visit your psychiatrist to allow them to monitor and provide guidance where there is a need to initiate treatment. The psychiatrist would benefit from information provided by a close family member or friend who spends a lot of time with you and is able to answer questions about your daily symptoms. Persistence of these symptoms for over a month should alert the doctor that a possible diagnosis of PTSD should be considered.



## How is PTSD managed?

The primary treatment for PTSD is psychotherapy, although medical treatment is often added. A combination of the two is preferred in order to facilitate recovery.

The psychotherapy teaches skills for dealing with the symptoms, helping you to think better about yourself and your environment.



## What can I do to get better?

Perform physical exercises to help you to reduce stress



Find someone who can attend a therapy session with you where you both learn how to refocus your thoughts. Allow yourself to open up to them about your thoughts when you are struggling



Expect that recovery from a mental health disorder is gradual and requires patience, persistence and realistic goal-setting



Remember that you do not have to handle the burden of PTSD on your own



**Questions**  
for Dr Thapelo Motshudi

Dr Thapelo Motshudi is a specialist in private practice. He is a consultant for NMG in the areas of Employee Wellness, Occupational Health and any other medical related topics.