

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD sometimes forms as a reaction to traumatic situations and is often called a “survival response gone wrong.” PTSD has many features, each of which can interfere with memory and focus.

Feature	Effect on Thinking
Relive bad experiences	Your mind is focused on the past, so you pay less attention to what is happening now
Avoid things that bring back bad memories	You focus on staying out of danger rather than thinking about what people are saying or what is happening
Startle easily , “on edge” or scan your environment	You are not able to be in the “here and now” Your brain produces chemicals that make it harder to store new memories

People with PTSD may be pre-occupied, focused on staying out of danger, rather than being present in the “here and now.” They may “zone out,” misplace things, feel lost, or forget what people tell them. Memory is never perfect. As we get older, we all need more repetitions and more time to come up with the right word.

Dementia is different than PTSD. Dementia involves problems carrying out day-to-day tasks, and worsens over time. With PTSD, the changes involve problems with attention and focus; these problems often vary with mood symptoms.

Be kind to yourself and:

- Focus on the here and now
- Make time to relax; take deep breaths

Learn skills to improve your thinking and use external memory aids as back-up:

- Keep things simple and organized
- Schedule your daily activities
- Pace yourself and don’t take on too much
- Do one task at a time and take regular breaks

Note what causes you distress or affects your thinking; recognize times and places where you do better. Consider getting treatment for PTSD.

Visit www.vets.gov/health-care/health-conditions/mental-health/ptsd to learn more about the options. Visit www.ptsd.va.gov for more resources and information.

