

The **FAACTs** about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Food Allergies



What is PTSD?

According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), “Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event. People who have PTSD may feel stressed or frightened, even when they are not in danger.”

There are many risk factors when it comes to developing PTSD, including living through a trauma, experiencing a childhood trauma, having a friend or family member experience danger or harm, and/or the sudden, unexpected death of a loved one. For individuals with food allergy, experiencing anaphylaxis, seeing your child/friend experience anaphylaxis, or having a sibling or child die of anaphylaxis are all forms of trauma. After witnessing or experiencing this extreme stress scenario, PTSD can develop.(1)

What can PTSD look like?

For a more comprehensive list of signs and symptoms (as it can be highly varied), visit the National Institute of Health’s page on PTSD.

For very young children:

- Forgetting how to speak.
- Acting out the scary event or drawing it while playing.
- Being abnormally clingy with a parent or guardian.

Teens & Adults:

- Flashbacks (re-experiencing the trauma again and again, and it can even include the presence of a physical symptom such as a racing heart).
- Having bad dreams.
- Scary thoughts.
- Avoiding places or things that remind them of the event.
- Issues sleeping.
- Having angry outbursts.
- Negative thoughts about oneself or the world in general.
- Having distorted thoughts of guilt or blame.

Remember, these symptoms are a normal response to trauma! However, after a traumatic event, symptoms should improve over time. When your safety is threatened, such as in the case of experiencing anaphylaxis, it makes sense to feel fearful. Yet, for people that develop PTSD, the symptoms do not go away over time, in fact, they may even get worse.

What can I do?

- Risk factors can be countered by resilience factors. Resilience factors you can build include, but are not limited to, adaptability, humor, self-efficacy, patience, faith, having goals, and optimism.
- Learn effective coping strategies.
- Exercise to improve mood.
- Join a support group.
- Seeing a counselor is always a great option. Consider finding a provider with experience working with individuals who have food allergies.

References:

1. Teufel, M., Biedermann, T., Rapps, N., Hausteiner, C., Henningsen, P., Enck, P., & Zipfel, S. (2007, July 7). Psychological burden of food allergy. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4146781/#B8>