

Trauma

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Traumatic events are those that put you or someone close to you at risk of serious harm or death. Our usual ways of coping are overwhelmed, leaving us feeling frightened and unsafe.

We can be traumatised through:

One-off events such as an accident, violent attack or natural disaster.

Ongoing stress such as childhood or intimate partner abuse, bullying, long-term illness or a pandemic such as COVID-19.

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Seeing someone else get hurt.
Living in an unstable or unsafe environment.

How you're affected by trauma is not related to how strong you are.

Your reaction can depend on whether you've had previous traumatic experiences, other stresses in your life and how much support you have afterwards.



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HOW MIGHT TRAUMA AFFECT ME?

When faced with a traumatic event, our bodies automatically react by preparing us to respond. Reactions can be defined as :

Fight

Fighting, being defensive, protesting.

Flight

Running away, escaping.

Freeze

Being unable to move or make decisions.

Fawn

Trying to please or win over someone hurting you.

Flop

Becoming overwhelmed and unresponsive, feeling disconnected from your body (dissociating).

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Physically, the heart can beat faster, thoughts race, breathing becomes quicker and shallower, sight becomes sharper, and feelings of nausea, cold hands, shaking or dizziness.



These all prepare the body to react to danger but can be uncomfortable or frightening if you don't know why they're happening.

Your body will usually return to normal within half an hour of the event.



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TRAUMA RECOVERY TIPS

GET MOVING

Trauma disrupts your body's natural equilibrium, freezing you in hyperarousal and fear. Exercise and movement can help repair your nervous system, burn off adrenaline and release endorphins.

Try to exercise for 30 minutes or more on most days.



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Try exercise that is rhythmic and engages both your arms and legs...



... like skateboarding.

Add a mindfulness element to your movement.

Instead of focusing on your thoughts or distracting yourself while you exercise, focus on your body and how it feels as you move. Notice all the sensations of your feet hitting the ground, the rhythm of your breathing, or the feeling of wind on your skin.

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TRAUMA RECOVERY TIPS

DON'T ISOLATE

Connecting to others face to face will help the healing process, so make an effort to maintain relationships and avoid spending too much time alone.

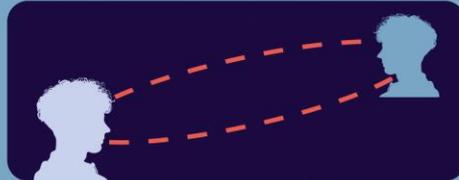


You don't have to talk about the trauma. Connecting with others doesn't have to involve talking about the trauma. Comfort comes from feeling engaged and accepted by others.



Ask for support. It is important that you have someone to share your feelings with face to face, someone who will listen attentively without judging you.

Participate in social activities, even if you don't feel like it.



Reconnect with old friends. If you've retreated from relationships that were once important to you, try to reconnect.



Join a support group for trauma survivors. Connecting with others who are facing the same problems can help reduce the sense of isolation, and hearing how others cope can help inspire recovery.

Volunteer. As well as helping others, volunteering can be a great way to challenge the sense of helplessness that often accompanies trauma.

Make new friends. If you live alone or far from family and friends, it's important to reach out and make new friends. Take a class or join a club to meet people with similar interests, connect to an alumni association, or reach out to neighbours or work colleagues.



If connecting to others is difficult...

Many people who have experienced trauma feel disconnected, withdrawn and find it difficult to connect with other people. If that describes you, there are some actions you can take before you next meet with a friend:

Exercise or move

Jump up and down, swing your arms and legs, or just flail around. Your head will feel clearer and you'll find it easier to connect.

Vocal toning

As strange as it sounds, vocal toning is a great way to open up to social engagement. Sit up straight and simply make "mmmm" sounds. Change the pitch and volume until you experience a pleasant vibration in your face.



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TRAUMA RECOVERY TIPS

SELF REGULATE YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

When feeling agitated, anxious, or out of control, it's important to know that you can change your arousal system and calm yourself.

Mindful breathing.

If you feel disoriented, confused, or upset, practising mindful breathing is a quick way to calm yourself. Take 60 breaths, focusing your attention on each 'out' breath.

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Sensory input.

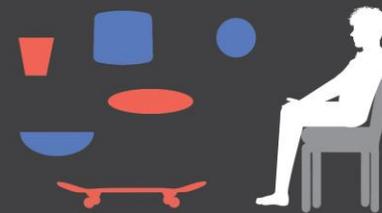
Does a specific sight, smell, or taste quickly make you feel calm? Or maybe petting an animal or listening to music quickly soothes you? Everyone responds to sensory input a little differently, so experiment with different techniques to find what works best for you.

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Staying grounded.

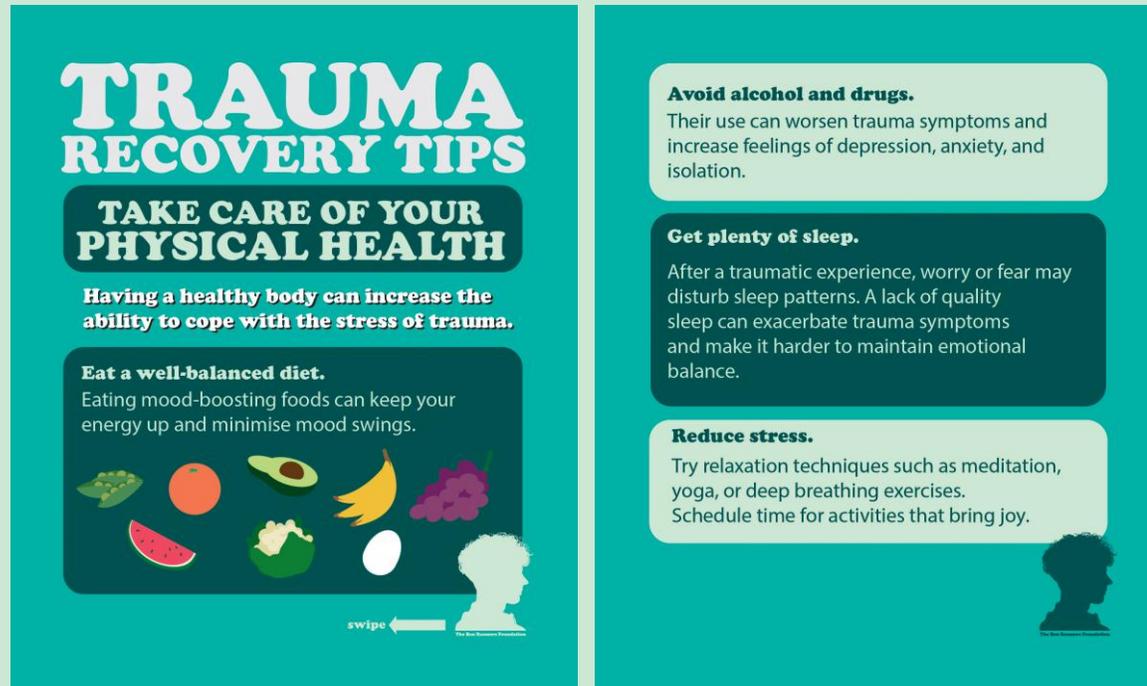
To feel more grounded in the present, sit on a chair, feel your feet on the ground and your back against the chair. Look around you and pick six objects with red or blue. Notice how your breathing gets deeper and calmer.



Allow yourself to feel what you feel when you feel it. Acknowledge your feelings about the trauma as they arise and accept them.



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An infographic titled "TRAUMA RECOVERY TIPS" on a teal background. The main title is in large, bold, white letters. Below it, a dark teal box contains the sub-heading "TAKE CARE OF YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH" in white. Underneath, a white box states: "Having a healthy body can increase the ability to cope with the stress of trauma." Below this, another white box titled "Eat a well-balanced diet." explains that eating mood-boosting foods can keep energy up and minimize mood swings. This section includes illustrations of various fruits and vegetables: grapes, an orange, an avocado, a banana, purple grapes, a slice of watermelon, cauliflower, and a white egg. At the bottom right of this section is a white silhouette of a person's head in profile, with the word "swipe" and a left-pointing arrow below it. To the right of the infographic, three white rounded rectangular boxes contain tips: "Avoid alcohol and drugs.", "Get plenty of sleep.", and "Reduce stress.", each with a brief explanation. A small black silhouette of a person's head is at the bottom right of the infographic area.

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TRAUMA TREATMENT

To heal from psychological and emotional trauma, it is important to resolve avoided unpleasant feelings and memories, discharge pent-up "fight-or-flight" energy, learn to regulate strong emotions and rebuild your ability to trust others.

A trauma specialist may use various therapy approaches in treatment.

Somatic Experiencing (SE)

Somatic experiencing focuses on bodily sensations rather than thoughts and memories about the traumatic event. Concentrating on what's happening in your body can release pent-up trauma-related energy through shaking, crying, and other forms of physical release.

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Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

Cognitive-behavioural therapy helps you process and evaluate your thoughts and feelings about a trauma.



Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR)

EMDR incorporates elements of cognitive-behavioural therapy with eye movements or other forms of rhythmic, left-right stimulation that can "unfreeze" traumatic memories.

