

Following a Traumatic Incident

If you've just been involved in something out of the ordinary, that threatened your safety or the stability of your world, it's very likely to take a while for you to return to feeling normal again. This information sheet is designed to help you understand what to expect while you process what has happened.

Common reactions in the first few days

Shock, disbelief, feeling helpless, shaky, upset, jumpy, confused, angry, fearful, numb.

What you might expect in the next few weeks

- Tiredness/Exhaustion
- Panic symptoms – palpitations, excessive sweating, tremors, digestive problems, dizziness
 - Muscle tension, leading to backache, headaches, neck pain
- Minor illnesses, colds etc.
- Sleeplessness, disturbing dreams
- Inability to enjoy anything
- Difficulty concentrating, making decisions, remembering things
- Vivid flashbacks
- Tearfulness
- Irritability
- Loss of appetite
- Anxiety – about what happened, what you did/didn't do, what will happen, breaking down, losing control: "I'm going mad"

What you can do

- Allow yourself to go over and over what happened
- Talk about it, especially with others who were involved
- Try not to withdraw from people
- Go with how you're feeling, don't try to deny or avoid what is a normal process of healing.
- Try not to turn to alcohol or other substances to help you cope
- Treat yourself as you would treat a good friend in the same situation – with understanding and compassion. Don't expect too much of yourself.
- Be careful e.g. while driving – accidents are more common at this time • Try to keep life as normal as possible.

Our minds take time to heal, just as bodies do. Most of you will find things gradually get better, and you'll probably be finding things manageable in 5-6 weeks. Some of you, perhaps up to a third, might not be, especially if the incident has special meaning for you and past memories of trauma have been triggered. Seeing us for counselling might be a good idea if you are still struggling with any of the following in 6 weeks' time:

What to look out for

- Feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling completely exhausted
- Increasingly withdrawing
- Feeling very numb
- Drinking too much
- Keeping very busy to block out your feelings
- Having difficulty functioning at work or home
- Increased anger and irritability
- Feeling very low and depressed
- Your relationships are affected
- Disrupted sleep
- Continuing flashbacks
- Complete pre-occupation with the incident

Remember – help is available, don't expect yourself to cope alone. Phone us on 0300 421 4455 or email workingwell@ghc.nhs.uk