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This article is about what can happen after a traumatic event ... or repeated traumatic events. We look at what happens to the brain when an individual is exposed to trauma.

And don't forget, last time we discussed self-care. We looked at what it is, why it's important, and how to create your own self-care rituals for greater mental health and wellbeing. Click [here](#) to find out more.

The Psychological Injury of Trauma

By Amanda Pulford
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When trauma occurs, those who are exposed to it can be significantly affected – in the immediate aftermath, for years following, or even after a period of time. Whilst recovery to a 'normal' state of functioning occurs for approximately 85% of people in the weeks and months after trauma, some individuals find that symptoms such as re-experiencing the traumatic event(s), avoidance of anything that might be associated with the traumatic event(s), negative changes to how they think and feel about the traumatic event(s) and life, and a negative change to how they react to external stimuli just don't go away. These symptoms describe Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

If you're interested in our previous articles, please click [here](#)

If you've got a suggestion for an article, or there's something more you would like to hear about, please send us an email by clicking [here](#)

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Brain scans of individuals who have been diagnosed with PTSD identify significant physical changes in major brain structures as a result of trauma. These brain changes can make life seem very confusing, and can lead to a feeling of being out of control, “not yourself”, and fearful of everything and everyone around you.

The following describes what happens in the brain of someone who experiences PTSD.

- The **prefrontal lobe** (responsible for language) is adversely affected by trauma. Someone with PTSD may struggle to find the right words to express what they are thinking and feeling.
- The **amygdala** (responsible for emotion regulation) increases in physical size due to an increase in activity. Someone with PTSD can find it hard to control their emotions.
- The **hippocampus** (responsible for memory and experience assimilation) shrinks in physical size. Someone with PTSD can experience short-term memory loss, and the inability to recognise the trauma as a ‘past event’.
- The **medial pre-frontal cortex** (responsible for negative emotion regulation, such as fear and anxiety) shrinks and is unable to regulate itself. Someone with PTSD can experience a constant state of fear.

So understanding how the brain changes after trauma assists us to find treatments for PTSD.

If you, or someone you know, experiences PTSD there are proven psychological therapies that can help. If you would like to find out more, please feel free to contact us on 0488 954 195, amanda@awakenpsychology.com.au or [click here](#)

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