

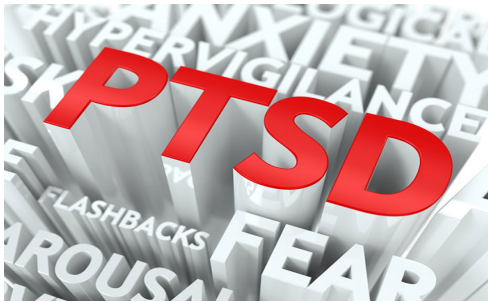


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This article is about what can happen after a traumatic event ... or repeated traumatic events. Previously we looked at what happens to the brain when an individual is exposed to trauma (click [here](#) to find out more). Today we look at what happens to the body when an individual is exposed to trauma.

And don't forget, last time we welcomed our newest staff member, Mary. We hope you get to meet here soon. Click [here](#) to find out more.

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

## The Physiological Injury of Trauma

**By Amanda Pulford**  
**Director and Clinical Psychologist**  
**(BPsych Hons, MPsych Clin)**

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](#)

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).

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While brain scans of individuals who have been diagnosed with PTSD identify significant physical changes in major brain structures as a result of trauma, research also shows us that there are significant physical changes that occur in the body as a result of trauma. These bodily changes can be overwhelming, can lead to a feeling of being out of control, and can be extremely tiring.

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

- a **physiological** reaction, known as the fight, flight, freeze or faint response, occurs and specific hormones are released that alter such things as skin sensitivity, alertness, heart rate, digestion, immune response, and learning skills
- **cortisol** is excreted to increase pain tolerance, helps to release sugars stored in the liver for energy, and can also cause hypervigilance – preparing the individual to act/react at a moment's notice, cortisol also affects the immune response
- **adrenaline** causes an increase in heart rate and sweating, can cause heart palpitations, make vision more acute, and stops digestion
- **epinephrine** and **norepinephrine** slow down the blood flow to the digestive system and increase the heart rate, as well as increase the blood flow to the major muscles; they can even inhibit learning skills and cause attention deficit or confusion
- **glucocorticoids** may cause constipation, diarrhea, headaches, sleep disturbances
- **thyroid hormone** production can decrease, affecting metabolism

So understanding that trauma changes the brain AND the body 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](mailto:amanda@awakenpsychology.com.au) or [click here](#)

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