



Healing from Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Everyone experiences trauma at some time or another. It may involve an accident, major surgery, violent assault or some type of abuse. It may involve a threat to yourself or to someone else. Experiencing trauma does not doom one to be permanently traumatized, however. The body has mechanisms for healing from trauma, just as it has mechanisms for healing from physical injury.

In some cases, the trauma we experience overwhelms a person's ability to cope. When this happens that individual may experience long-term physical and emotional effects from the trauma. When these long-term effects are severe, modern medicine calls the person's condition Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

PTSD is most often associated with the horrors of war and used to be called "shell shock" or "battle fatigue." Today, we understand that PTSD can develop after exposure to any event that results in psychological or physical trauma that overwhelms a person's ability to cope. Furthermore, a person may not be suffering from full-blown PTSD, but may still have unresolved trauma that is interfering with their emotional and physical health.

The Effects of Unresolved Trauma

Unhealed trauma can leave a person feeling disconnected from life and other people. It can make it difficult for one to get in touch with one's own feelings and to be sensitive to the needs of others. A person suffering from PTSD may feel like they are unable to cope with the challenges of life, and can react to normal life stresses with excessive anger or feelings of helplessness. They may become hypersensitive or feel numb and paralyzed. Whatever the effects, being traumatized makes it difficult to form relationships and places stress on existing relationships.

The basic symptoms of unresolved trauma include re-experiencing the original trauma(s) through flashbacks or nightmares, avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, and a hyper-vigilant state that can make it difficult to relax, fall asleep or stay asleep. Depending on their personality and the nature of the trauma people may become angry and easily irritated or become anxious, fearful and withdrawn.

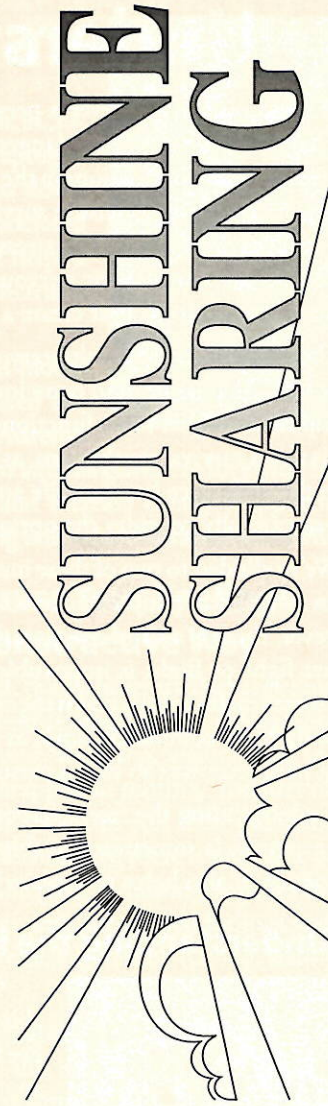
Drug and alcohol abuse are common in people who suffer from PTSD as they use these substances to "self-medicate" to escape pain and anxiety. The drugs and alcohol bring temporary relief, but ultimately make the symptoms worse. In short, unresolved trauma and PTSD can cripple a person's life, and many men and women struggle with it.

Healing is Possible

When you're suffering from unresolved trauma, it can be hard to know where to turn for help, but healing is possible. The process may not be easy, and part of the healing may come through faith and trust in a higher power, but people have been able to heal from all kinds of severe traumas with the right kind of help and personal effort.

We can't provide you with all the answers to healing from trauma in four short pages, but in this issue of *Sunshine Sharing* we provide recommendations to help you get started. Professional assistance is likely required and the individual outcome also depends on a person's willingness to acknowledge that they are traumatized, face what is going inside of themselves and start actively seeking healing. As long as a person remains in denial they cannot find healing.

Learn More About Trauma and Trauma Recovery Inside...



Your guide to better health the natural way.

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Important Notice

The information in *Sunshine Sharing* is for educational purposes only and should not be used to diagnose and treat diseases. If you have a health problem, we recommend you consult a competent health practitioner before embarking on any course of treatment.

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Understanding Trauma and PTSD

Trauma occurs whenever a person senses that his/her life or security is threatened. This danger (whether real or perceived) activates a cascade of reactions in the nervous and glandular system that prime the body to ensure survival by being able to fight off the danger or flee from it. This stress reaction activates the adrenal glands and the sympathetic nervous system, releasing hormones and neurotransmitters that create a tense, hyper-alert state.

These reactions are involuntary. They are instinctive reactions of the body that go beyond conscious thought. In fact, they actually hijack the higher brain functions, inhibiting rational thought. This is also a survival mechanism, as split-second actions can often make the difference between life and death in a crisis. There's no time to carefully consider the options in a real crisis.

We've alluded to two of these instinctive reactions—fight back or run away. Most people understand the fight-or-flight response. However, there is a third reaction that occurs when instinct tells us that fight or flight is impossible. This is the freeze response. The freeze reaction shuts down the central nervous system, causing the body to go completely limp, as if one were dead. It also shuts down pain receptors so that a person does not experience pain.

Understanding the freeze response is a key to understanding why a person is sometimes unable to recover from a traumatic experience. It also helps to explain PTSD.

Understanding the Freeze Response



Generally speaking, if we are able to successfully fight back or flee from danger, we will not suffer any residual effects. In fact, being able to successfully overcome a danger tends to leave us feeling empowered and successful, not traumatized.

In contrast, when an experience is so overwhelming that we freeze, we may experience a feeling of helplessness, even after the danger is passed. So, we are more likely to suffer from PTSD when a trauma caused us to freeze.

Researchers have come to understand this freeze response by studying the interactions between predators and prey. For example, when a cat catches a mouse, it will often play with it. The mouse may appear dead, but is often simply frozen. If the mouse is doomed to be eaten, the freeze response mercifully prevents it from feeling pain as it dies.

Even though the mouse appears dead while in the freeze response, its muscles and nerves are very much alive. In fact, they are highly charged so the mouse can rapidly flee if the opportunity arises. The freeze state is also an instinctive, protective reaction. If the cat isn't really hungry, it may get bored and leave the mouse alone. If this happens, the highly charged nerves and muscles can spring into action to escape.

When an animal that has been in a freeze reaction reaches safety, it will shake involuntarily before returning to its normal, relaxed

state. This shaking is the discharge of tension from the nervous system and muscles. If this discharge did not occur, the animal would remain in the highly charged fight or flight reaction, with the lower brain centers remaining in control.

When Tension is Not Released

Dr. Peter A. Levine has researched this phenomenon extensively and written several books about it. In his book, *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*, Dr. Levine points out that wild animals suffer numerous life-threatening dangers but do not remain traumatized. This is because they are literally able to “shake it off,” meaning they allow their body to spontaneously discharge the tension in the nerves and muscles once they are away from the danger.



Unfortunately, human beings are often trained to inhibit the impulse to cry, shout, shake or otherwise release this tension after a traumatic experience. Instead, they are told, “control yourself,” “get over it,” or otherwise encouraged to inhibit this natural trauma recovery process.

Dr. Levine explains that, “The shaking and trembling we experience following traumatic experiences are part of the innate process of resetting the nervous system and restoring our psyche to wholeness. If we become frightened by these sensations and resist them, we block our return to nervous equilibrium and mental and emotional wholeness—and the remaining trauma inside us becomes frozen.” [From *In An Unspoken Voice* by Peter A. Levine]

Another author who provides a similar insight to trauma is Harvey Jackins, author of *The Human Side of Human Beings*. He maintains that we need to discharge the effects of trauma through expressing anger, crying, shaking or other emotional reactions in order for the higher brain to regain control and make sense out of what has happened to us. When we are unable to do this, the unresolved trauma can be retriggered by similar experiences, causing us to lose rational thought and self-control and revert to the lower brain reactions. We experience this as emotions that overwhelm our ability to think rationally.

Many of our traumas come from childhood. Adults often do not recognize that children may be traumatized by things that seem insignificant as adults. When a child's fear, anger and sadness are criticized or even disapproved of by parents, they can remain as trauma that can be retriggered later in life.

Most of us periodically experience this retriggering of unresolved trauma from childhood. We may feel perfectly fine, then something comes along and “pushes our buttons” and we suddenly feel angry, afraid, sad, overwhelmed and/or stuck. The disapproval we felt over experiencing these emotions makes us afraid to express them and allow our body to discharge them. So, we try to make them go away (suppress them) or we blame them on others. This keeps us stuck in the trauma and unable to engage the recovery process.

Getting Unstuck from Trauma

With the understanding of trauma presented on the previous page, we can now formulate a strategy to help with recovery. Whether a person is trying to deal with lesser traumas that simply cause them to “lose control” once in a while or more serious traumas that result in the symptoms of PTSD, the process of clearing these unresolved traumas is essentially the same. More serious traumas will probably require professional assistance, but here are some basic techniques people can use to aid the recovery process.

Feed the Body

Just as the body needs nutrients to heal from physical injury, the body also needs nutrients to heal from trauma. Often, a person suffering from PTSD or other chronic trauma is abusing their body with tobacco, alcohol, drugs and junk food. This tends to “numb” them to their feelings and actually inhibits recovery.

So, a person who wants to recover from trauma should start by eating a healthy diet. Avoid refined and processed foods, in favor of nutritionally dense fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and high quality proteins. This helps to keep the nerves and glands in balance, which aids the body’s ability to discharge the tension in the nervous system and muscles more efficiently.

Calm the Nerves, Feed the Adrenals

There are also some basic supplements to consider. **Nutri-Calm** is a good basic supplement for feeding the nerves and helping a person to feel more energized and calm at the same time. **Magnesium Complex** or **Kava Kava** can also be helpful where there is a lot of tension in the body, as these remedies help tissues relax.

Often times a person who has experienced severe trauma gets stuck in a hyper-vigilant mode. This means that their fight-or-flight responses are on most of the time. They are unable to relax, have difficulty sleeping and feel both stressed and exhausted at the same time. When this happens, adaptogens may be helpful.

Adaptogens calm down the body’s stress reactions, reducing the levels of stress hormones and calming the nervous system. This can help a person be less triggered by normal stresses of the day. **Eleuthero Root** is the most well-known adaptogen, and is very helpful for calming down these stress reactions.

Additional Help and Information

For more information on trauma and PTSD and what can be done to heal from these problems, contact the person who gave this newsletter to you or seek professional help. You can also consult the following sources:

In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness and Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma by Peter A. Levine

The Human Side of Human Beings by Harvey Jackins

The Heart’s Key to Health, Happiness and Success and Healing with Flowers by Steven Horne

The Language of Emotions: What Your Feelings are Trying to Tell You by Karla McLaren

The Comprehensive Guide to Nature’s Sunshine Products by Tree of Light

Nervous Fatigue Formula, a Chinese formula that acts as an adaptogen may also be helpful. It calms down the hyper-vigilant state associated with unresolved trauma and helps a person sleep better. It also increases energy levels during the day.

People suffering from full-blown PTSD typically have exhausted adrenal glands. Giving them **Adrenal Support** can help rebuild their adrenal glands, reduce their baseline stress levels, improve sleep and increase energy. Supporting the adrenals will make counseling and other therapies more effective.



Learn to Express Your Feelings, But in a Constructive Way

As we’ve already indicated, the inability to discharge tension in the nervous system through expressing feelings *through the body*, via sobbing, shaking, punching, shouting, wailing and so forth, is the reason people remain trapped in trauma. The first obstacle to healing is that people don’t want to feel their pain; they just want to make it go away. Unfortunately, there is no magic pill that erases the pain of trauma. The path to healing requires that one come out of denial, reconnect with suppressed feelings and allow the natural mechanisms for releasing trauma (crying, shaking and so forth) to play out.

The process occurs automatically when we allow it, but we have to become self-honest and acknowledge what is going on inside of us first. Dr. Levine maintains that, “...in order to experience this restorative faculty, we must develop the capacity to face certain uncomfortable and frightening physical sensations and feelings without becoming overwhelmed by them.” [From *In an Unspoken Voice*]

It’s also important to recognize two ways we deal with the feelings associated with trauma that don’t help. First, just saying, “I feel angry or hurt,” is not what we mean. One can talk *about* one’s feelings without *engaging* them. When we engage feelings, *our body and vocal tones* express them, not our words. It is this bodily discharge that releases the tension and leads to healing.

Secondly, attacking other people and blaming them for our feelings is also not expressing them. Other people’s behavior may be *triggering* the unresolved trauma we have inside, but their behavior is not *causing* it. As long as we blame others for what we feel we are not taking responsibility for feelings and healing is impossible. To heal, we have to take responsibility for our feelings.

Flower Essences Can Help

Flower essences are homeopathic-like remedies that help a person understand their emotions and find healing through self-awareness. One of the flower essence blends that can help with trauma is **Distress Remedy**. It can be taken during or immediately

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Have You Been Traumatized?

All of us experience traumatic events in our lives. Sometimes we are able to overcome these difficulties, but other times they can overwhelm our ability to cope, leaving us feeling permanently traumatized.

Unresolved trauma can cause us to react to normal life stresses with excessive anger, feelings of helplessness, hypersensitivity or detachment. It can contribute to addiction and cause relationship problems.

Fortunately, there are ways to heal from unresolved trauma. Learn some principles of holistic trauma recovery inside.

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after a traumatic experience to help a person release the pain of the trauma and return to a normal state. Distress Remedy can also help when someone “pushes our buttons,” that is, their behavior brings up overwhelming emotions of fear, anger or sadness. It will help a person center themselves and become calm and self-aware. So, Distress Remedy can help both current and past trauma.

There are also specific flower essence blends that can help a person to discharge trauma. When chronic fear becomes part of our trauma pattern, one may feel helpless and unable to cope with life. **Be Courageous** is a flower remedy that will help in these cases. When fears have turned into chronic anxiety that creates addictions and other dysfunctional behaviors in a person’s life, the **Be Response-Able** flower essence can help a person become emotionally self-honest, so they can acknowledge their fears and start working through them.

Grief is another part of trauma. Most trauma involves some kind of loss, and the grieving process helps us let go of what was lost. If one’s losses make one feel like a victim of life, helpless and dependent, then **Release It** flower essence blend can be helpful. When one has blocked sadness and pain, so one is unable to cry or grieve, **Open Heart** is the flower essence blend that can help.

Trauma can also create angry feelings. When one tends to lose one’s temper easily and is impatient with others, **Keep Cool** will help. If a person tends to stuff their anger and tries to appease other people to keep the peace, **Find Strength** is the best choice.

This is just a small sample of the holistic remedies that can aid trauma recovery. There are many others, including counseling, body work, deep breathing and journaling. For more ideas, check out some of the books and resources listed on page three. Most of all, don’t give up hope! There are answers and healing is possible.