

Common reactions to disaster

Aetna Resources For LivingSM

There's no one way all people react after a disaster. But there are common reactions many may experience.



Sometimes stress reactions start on the scene of the disaster. Or they can appear hours, days, weeks or even months later.

These reactions can be physical, mental, emotional or behavioral in nature. Here are some examples:

Physical symptoms

- Fatigue
- Shock symptoms
- Nausea
- Headaches
- Vomiting
- Profuse sweating
- Fine motor tremors
- Chills
- Ticks
- Teeth grinding
- Muscle aches
- Dizziness

Cognitive symptoms

- Memory loss
- Trouble concentrating
- Disturbing thoughts or memories
- Difficulty with calculations or making decisions
- Trouble with prioritizing issues

Emotional symptoms

- Anxiety
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Crying easily
- Grief
- Imagining what the victims went through
- Depression
- Fear of harm to self or others
- Irritability

Behavioral symptoms

- Insomnia
- Substance abuse
- "Dark" humor
- Gait change
- Ritualistic behavior
- Hyper vigilance
- Unwillingness to leave scene

Although these may be normal reactions to trauma, it's important to talk to your doctor about any physical or other new symptoms. And if you or someone you know has trouble recovering from a disaster, talking to a mental health professional can help.

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