

What is Trauma?

Physical trauma can have many causes. At Queen Victoria Hospital, we treat patients who have suffered burn injuries, hand injuries, facial injuries, serious lacerations involving nerves and tendons and patients whose injuries require specialised plastic surgery intervention. All these injuries are the result of trauma.

Traumatic incidents causing physical injury are usually sudden, unexpected, potentially life-threatening events outside of one's control and can result in not only physical trauma but also psychological/emotional trauma.

Who may be affected by a traumatic event?

- The person who was injured.
- Those involved in the accident/incident but were not injured.
- Those who witnessed the accident/incident.
- Those who were involved in helping the injured person to hospital.
- Those who cared for the injured person.

The body's normal response to trauma:

Sustaining the injury, witnessing or helping at the trauma scene will normally have been unexpected. The body's response is usually one of intense fear, helplessness or horror.

There is generally a feeling of being out of control and the body's normal response is to regain control by making sense of what happened.

Normal responses may include all or some of the following symptoms:

- You need to tell what has happened to your partner, family and friends, re-telling it many times.
- You might think about the event all the time, and repeatedly ask 'what if' questions - what if I had not gone out at that time?... not used that piece of machinery?... etc.
- You might notice you are extra sensitive to anything that reminds you of what happened, e.g. noises, smells or images.
- You might try to avoid situations that remind you of what happened, e.g. going to the scene, meeting with people who were involved or witnessed the trauma, getting in a car or using the same or similar piece of machinery.

- You might experience sleep disturbance by either having difficulty getting to sleep or waking with dreams linked to what happened.
- You may experience images of the scene when you least expect them.
- These symptoms should lessen with the passage of time. Some people do not experience any symptoms until some time after the event.

The body's abnormal response to trauma:

This is said to occur when the symptoms do not lessen but increase in frequency and get in the way of you returning to your pre-accident/incident day-to-day routine.

People close to you may comment that you are not the same as you were. They may notice that you are more quiet or reluctant to resume pre-accident/incident activities. You may not recognise this for yourself. You may be suffering from stress related to the trauma.

Assessment and treatments are available through the Department of Psychological Therapy and are aimed at lessening the psychological/emotional impact of your accident/incident and assist you in returning to your previous way of living.

What we can do for you:

The psychological therapy service can provide you with:

- Information – to enable you to recognise when there is a need to seek professional support/ advice.
- Telephone contact - you can telephone for advice/support or check on/or review progress.
- An assessment - to determine what treatment may be helpful. The assessment is with a member of the team at Queen Victoria Hospital and lasts for approximately one hour.
- Psychological therapy - help with coming to terms with the outcome of the trauma, to rebuild a plan for the future.
- Onward referral - to services closer to your home.

How to contact the Psychological Therapy Service

You may contact the department directly to speak with a staff member or leave a message, giving us your name and contact details, for a team member to return your call.

Psychological Therapy Team
Tel: 01342 414478

Alternatively, you may ask a nurse, doctor or other clinical member of staff to make the referral for you. After making an appointment, you will then be seen by a team member for an initial assessment to determine your needs.

Please note the Psychological Therapy Service treats all enquiries and patient information as confidential.

This leaflet is informed by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidelines on psychological management of trauma

Please ask if you would like this leaflet in larger print or a different format.

Department of Psychological Therapy
Issue 6 – Ref. No. 0124
Approved by the Patient Information Group
Print November 2012 – Review November 2015

© Copyright QVH NHS Foundation Trust
qvh.nhs.uk

Queen Victoria Hospital 
NHS Foundation Trust

Department of Psychological Therapy
Reactions to Trauma

