

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF AFTER TRAUMA



Headington Institute

When you experience a traumatic event, your body goes into a state of high-alert. Experiencing some stress symptoms as a result is perfectly normal, and symptoms will usually subside and disappear with time. However, you can take steps to help your body cope with stress reactions and ensure you don't remain in a state of emergency-preparation for longer than necessary. Here are some do's and don't's for after a traumatic event...

Do...

- Review what you know about stress, trauma and coping
- Get some exercise
- Acknowledge you may be experiencing normal reactions to an abnormal event. Don't label yourself crazy or weak.
- Be extra careful. Avoid tasks and activities that are too demanding.
- Allow yourself some extra time to accomplish ordinary tasks.
- Structure time so that you spend some alone and some with others.
- Give yourself permission not to talk to or spend time with people you normally find draining and depressing.
- Communicate. Talk or write about your experiences and reactions.
- Help yourself relax by doing things you enjoy such as reading, writing, physical activity, visiting someplace beautiful, and watching movies.
- Work to relax by setting aside some time to experiment with various relaxation strategies, including: therapeutic massage; yoga; progressive muscle relaxation; and warm baths.
- Get plenty of rest, even if you can't sleep.
- Eat good, well-balanced meals.
- Make decisions about routine daily events (such as choosing what or where to eat for lunch) even if you don't feel like it.
- Don't make any big life decisions or changes (such as taking a new job or getting a divorce).

Don't...

- Don't increase your use – or abuse – of alcohol, drugs, gambling, smoking etc.
- Don't use too much caffeine and other stimulants. Your body is already 'hyped up' and these substances only increase your level of arousal.
- Don't just try to "just forget" about the event by working more than usual.
- Don't avoid *all* thoughts and feelings about the event.
- Don't watch violent movies or TV shows, or read books that are graphically violent.