

The psychological impact of a serious injury



You've had a serious injury, and it can lead to all kinds of psychological reactions. Here are some tips to help you get through this period.

What are the most common reactions?

In the days and weeks after the accident, the following reactions are **common**:

- replaying images of the accident in your mind
- having dreams or nightmares about the accident
- feeling nervous
- having more intense emotions (sadness, anger, etc.)
- blaming yourself
- wanting to avoid thinking or talking about what happened
- being easily startled
- sleeping less well
- having trouble concentrating

These reactions are completely normal. They're not a sign of weakness. It's the situation itself that isn't normal.

People who saw the accident (work colleagues, friends, families) may also have these reactions.

How long will it take for me to get better?

After a few months, your reactions should subside or disappear. This happens gradually, as you regain your autonomy and get back to doing your pre-accident activities.

Everyone recovers at their own pace. It's healthy to respect that pace, as with any grieving process.

What can help me?

Here are some tips:

- Don't isolate yourself.
- Take advantage of advice from members of your care team. Regardless of which professional you see, feel free to talk with them about your difficulties. They'll be able to help you or direct you to the person who will know what to do.



- Limit your use of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco. This will help the injury to heal faster.
- Avoid blaming yourself. That reaction is normal. But remember, accidents happen very quickly and for many reasons. Keep in mind that you didn't intend to injure yourself.
- As much as possible, avoid making the event taboo, i.e., something "we must not talk about."
- Resume your usual activities as soon as possible, to the extent that you can. Your care team can guide you if you have questions or concerns.
- Try to accept your reactions. They're normal in this situation.
- If you want to, you can learn more about psychological reactions after a serious injury, either through questions to your care team, or from recommended books or websites.

Each of us has the resources to get through hard times.

Trust in your ability to adapt.

When should I consult someone?

Watch for the following signs. If they're happening **6 months after the accident**, it's a good idea to consult a psychologist. Some psychologists specialize in trauma treatment.

- You have nightmares about the accident or keep thinking about it without wanting to.
- You put a lot of effort into avoiding situations that remind you of the accident. For example, you can't bring yourself to go back to the scene of the accident.
- You avoid looking at the part of your body that's been injured.
- You're always on your guard and you startle easily.

- You often feel sad or depressed.
- You're unable to go back to work.
- You're drinking more alcohol or taking drugs.

It's possible to meet with a resource patient. This is someone who's had an experience similar to yours.

Their listening and support can be very helpful. If this interests you, ask a member of your care team.



USEFUL RESOURCES

For information on post-traumatic stress:

quebec.ca/en/health/mental-health

In the search bar, type
"post-traumatic stress"

Trauma Studies Center website:
trauma.criusmm.net/en/

To find a psychologist in your region, contact the **Ordre des psychologues du Québec**:
514 738-1881
ordrepsy.qc.ca/english

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our website
chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante

The content of this document in no way replaces the advice of your healthcare professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
chumontreal.qc.ca