

# Understanding Anniversary Reactions

We know that on the anniversary of a traumatic event, people often experience a re-occurrence of some or all of the feelings they experienced at the time of the event. This is called an “anniversary reaction.”

Anniversary reactions can be initiated by anything associated with the original trauma, including the season of the year, a particular date, or even the hour of the day. Anniversary reactions may be mild, moderate, or strong, but they are normal!

## “What are the common anniversary reactions?”

- Exhaustion
- Headaches or anxiety
- Sleeplessness
- Bad dreams
- Irritability
- Loss of appetite
- Feelings of numbness
- Confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling afraid, nervous, or helpless
- Feeling sad or depressed
- Thinking about the event over and over, even when you don’t want to.

## “How long will these anniversary reactions last?”

As time passes (days or weeks), anniversary reactions should get weaker, and symptoms will occur less often.

The time it takes to recover will vary. Much like the flu, anniversary reactions must run their course. Just remember to accept these reactions as normal, and they will ease in time.

## “What can I do to feel better?”

Time will help, as will talking it out with loved ones, co-workers, friends, clergy, or counselors—anyone who cares and is a good listener. Let the stress reactions “flow” through you. Fighting against them only increases stress. Accept that these reactions are there, for now. Eat healthy food, take walks, exercise, get plenty of rest, and remember to talk it out with people who care.

## “What if I begin to feel worse?”

If your reactions get worse, this simply means that the event was so strong that it pushed you past your normal coping ability. If things do get worse, consider talking to a trained professional who understands reactions.