

Symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress

This checklist can help you identify common signs that you may be experiencing overexposure to the trauma of others, leading to secondary traumatic stress (STS) or vicarious trauma. When you begin to see increases in these symptoms, it is time to activate your self-care plan.

Note: Many of these signs and symptoms may also be indicative of an underlying medical or mental health issue. Don't hesitate to seek medical attention, even if you think these symptoms are caused by STS or vicarious trauma. Sometimes self-care alone isn't enough.

<p>Cognitive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty focusing or concentrating • Easily or frequently confused • Feeling indecisive or making irrational or impulsive decisions • Diminished self-confidence or increased self-doubt • Increased worrying • Pervasive negative thoughts • Forgetfulness or memory lapses 	<p>Physical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased or worsening headaches • Increased or decreased appetite • Increased or decreased need for or ability to sleep • Frequent minor illnesses such as colds • Changes in heart or breathing rates • Rashes, eczema, or other skin outbreaks • Shakiness (hands) or loss of physical strength • Increased clumsiness or being more accident prone
<p>Emotional/relational</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling overwhelmed • Vague, ever-present sadness • Experiencing survivor's guilt—a feeling of guilt or shame that you have survived a trauma or experienced fewer ill effects than others with similar experiences • Feeling helpless or powerless • Loss of sense of purpose or meaning • Unable to rest or relax • Irritable, cranky, moody, or always “on edge” • Questioning your own belief system • Withdrawing from friends, spouse, others • Feeling alone, isolated • Loss of interest in intimacy or sex 	<p>Behavioral</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neglect or avoidance of responsibilities • Loss of interest in activities that typically brought pleasure • Tics or nervous habits (nail-biting, pacing, etc.) • Increase in smoking, drinking, or use of other substances • Excessive working or overactivity • Decrease in quantity or quality of work • Increased perfectionism or obsession with details • Increased conflict with co-workers