Emotional Trauma and Shock After a Car Accident

A car accident can leave you with physical injuries, but it can also harm you in other ways. After being involved in a serious crash, many people struggle with emotional trauma and shock that can significantly impact their lives.

If you’re experiencing symptoms, don’t hesitate to seek support

A car crash can be a very upsetting and traumatic experience, resulting in a wide range of emotional reactions that can affect people differently. Many people find it challenging to cope with these emotions and may need support as they recover from the accident.

What is emotional trauma and shock?

This refers to the psychological and emotional responses that people experience after going through a distressing or traumatic event. Common symptoms include:

- **Intense fear or anxiety**: Accident victims may experience persistent feelings of fear, anxiety, or nervousness, particularly when thinking about the accident or being in a similar driving situation.
- **Flashbacks and nightmares**: Clear and upsetting memories of the accident may intrude into a person’s thoughts, leading to flashbacks while awake or nightmares during sleep.
- **Avoidance behavior**: Victims may try to avoid situations or places that remind them of the accident. This could include avoiding driving on specific roads, even if it means making a big change in their daily routine.
- **Mood swings**: Sudden and extreme shifts in mood, from sadness and despair to irritability and anger, are common emotional responses to trauma.
- **Emotional numbness**: Some people may feel emotionally detached or numb, as if they are unable to experience positive or negative emotions fully.
- **Difficulty concentrating**: Trauma can impact cognitive function, leading to difficulties in focusing, making decisions, or remembering things.
- **Hyperarousal**: People may have a heightened state of arousal, which they experience as being on edge, having a short fuse, or being easily startled.
- **Insomnia or sleep disturbances**: Trauma can disrupt sleep patterns, leading to difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or experiencing restful sleep.
- **Physical symptoms**: Accident victims may suffer headaches, stomachaches, muscle tension, or fatigue in the weeks or months following a crash.
- **Social withdrawal**: People may withdraw from social interactions, preferring to isolate themselves from others.
- **Guilt or self-blame**: Some victims may feel guilty or blame themselves for the accident, even if they were not at fault.
- **Loss of interest**: Activities or hobbies that used to be fun may no longer hold the same appeal or interest.
Recovering emotionally after a serious accident

When you are physically hurt, a doctor can treat your injuries and monitor your progress. But recovering from emotional trauma is different. It’s a gradual process that will take time and is not the same for everyone.

The American Psychological Association suggests several steps for recovering from the effects of trauma.

- **Seek support**: Don’t hesitate to reach out to friends, family, or support groups to share your feelings and emotions. Talking about your experience can help.  
- **Ease back into your routine**: Simply being on the road can be a reminder of what happened. It can be tempting to want to isolate, sleep longer, or stay at home to try to avoid memories of the accident. But avoidance will get in the way of your recovery.  
- **Practice self-care**: Be sure to eat healthy meals and get plenty of sleep. Engage in activities that promote relaxation and well-being, such as exercise, meditation, or hobbies you enjoy.  
- **Have patience**: Remember, it’s normal to have a strong emotional reaction after a traumatic event. Allow yourself time to process your emotions.

How long does emotional trauma and shock last following an accident? It can vary from person to person. Some people may recover fairly quickly, while others may struggle with symptoms for an extended period.

If feelings of distress persist or get more intense, it’s important to take them seriously and get help. Ignoring emotional trauma can lead to long-term consequences, including chronic anxiety, depression, or even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Consider seeking help from a licensed therapist or counselor experienced in trauma recovery.

**Can I recover compensation for emotional distress after a car accident?**

If a negligent driver caused the accident that left you hurt, you have the right to seek financial compensation for the damages you suffered. This includes compensation for medical expenses as well as lost wages. It also includes compensation for other types of damages, including emotional distress.

Emotional trauma is not as tangible as a physical injury, but it’s important to be able to prove that the accident had an impact on your emotional well-being. There are different types of evidence that can be used:

- **Medical records**: These may include records from visits to mental health professionals, psychologists, or psychiatrists who have diagnosed and treated the emotional distress.  
- **Personal accounts**: You can give an account – and if necessary, testimony – describing the emotional toll of the accident, its impact on your daily life, and how it has affected your ability to function or engage in normal activities.
- **Diaries or journals**: If you kept a journal or diary after the accident, it may include an account of your emotional struggles.

- **Witness statements**: Statements from friends, family, or other witnesses who have observed changes in your behavior or emotional state after the accident can support the claim of emotional trauma.

- **Expert testimony**: Mental health experts can describe emotional trauma and how it can negatively impact a person’s life. Psychologists or psychiatrists can provide professional opinions on the causes and extent of emotional distress.

- **Employment records**: Records showing a decline in work performance, increased absenteeism, or an inability to perform job duties due to emotional trauma can be used as evidence.

- **Prescription records**: Records of prescribed medications for anxiety, depression, or other emotional conditions following the accident can support a claim for emotional damages.

- **Photographs or videos**: Visual evidence of the accident scene and your injuries can help establish that you experienced a traumatic event.

**Emotional trauma and shock are real consequences of car accidents**

A car accident can impact your life in many ways – physically, financially, and emotionally. You deserve financial compensation for all of the damages you suffered. But negligent drivers often deny responsibility and insurance companies may dispute your claim. They can be especially skeptical of claims involving emotional distress.

Insurance companies handle car accident claims every day and have the advantage. That’s why you need an experienced attorney on your side. At Smith & Hassler, we will fight for you every step of the way.

Our legal team investigates to get the facts that help us build a strong case for compensation. We determine all of the damages you suffered, including the emotional trauma and shock that you experienced. Then we fight for the financial compensation you deserve. We are determined to help you get the best possible outcome.

If you were hurt in a Houston, TX crash, learn more about how we can help. Contact us today to schedule a free consultation.