

Long-Term PTSD and Driving Anxiety After a Georgia Car Accident

The Crash Ends in Seconds. The Psychological Aftermath Can Last for Years.

A [broken bone](#) shows up on an X-ray. A [herniated disc](#) shows up on an MRI. The fear of getting back in a car, the flashbacks that hit without warning on a highway on-ramp, the panic attack that starts before you've even turned the key; none of those show up on any scan. But they are just as real, just as disabling, and just as legally compensable as any physical injury a crash produces.

Post-traumatic stress disorder and driving anxiety are among the most underreported and undervalued consequences of serious [car accidents in Georgia](#). Insurance companies know this. They count on injury victims not understanding that psychological harm has real legal weight, and they use that gap in awareness to pay out far less than a claim is actually worth.

At the [Law Offices of Gary Martin Hays & Associates, P.C.](#), we fight for the full picture of what our clients have been through, including what doesn't show up on an imaging report. Georgia families deserve to understand what PTSD and driving anxiety actually look like after a crash, how they're documented, and how they factor into the compensation a victim can recover.

Car Accidents Are the Leading Cause of PTSD in the General Population

Most people associate post-traumatic stress disorder with combat veterans or survivors of violent crime. The reality is that motor vehicle accidents are the single leading cause of PTSD in the general civilian population, according to research published in peer-reviewed medical literature. A systematic review published in the [National Institutes of Health](#) found a PTSD prevalence of more than 20 percent among traffic accident survivors, with symptoms persisting well beyond the initial recovery period in a significant portion of those affected.

The numbers behind that statistic reflect real suffering. Studies examining psychological outcomes after crashes report that between 42 and 55 percent of accident survivors present mental health symptoms, including anxiety and depression, that persist for two or more years following the crash. Even in cases involving relatively minor physical injuries, poor psychological recovery is well documented, particularly when PTSD develops alongside other conditions like depression or generalized anxiety disorder.

Georgia crash victims don't have to have been seriously physically injured to develop PTSD. The disorder can develop after any accident in which the victim feared for their life, witnessed someone else being seriously hurt, or experienced the sudden, violent disruption that a crash produces. The severity of the trauma doesn't always predict whether PTSD will follow.

What PTSD Actually Looks Like After a Georgia Car Accident

PTSD is diagnosed under criteria established by the [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition \(DSM-5\)](#), and its presentation after a car accident follows recognizable

patterns. Understanding what those patterns look like helps victims recognize what they're experiencing and understand why it matters legally.

The most common symptoms of PTSD following a car accident include:

- **Intrusive Memories And Flashbacks:** Vivid, involuntary recollections of the crash that arrive without warning, sometimes triggered by sounds, smells, or driving situations that resemble elements of the accident.
- **Nightmares And Sleep Disruption:** Recurring dreams about the crash or the events surrounding it, often accompanied by difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, which compounds fatigue and impairs daily functioning.
- **Avoidance Behaviors:** Deliberately avoiding roads, intersections, or situations associated with the crash. Some victims stop driving entirely. Others take significant detours to avoid the location where the accident happened.
- **Hypervigilance While Driving:** Extreme watchfulness behind the wheel that goes beyond normal caution, including slamming the brakes at minor perceived hazards, an inability to relax in moving vehicles, or constant scanning for threats that aren't present.
- **Emotional Numbness And Withdrawal:** A flattening of emotional responses, loss of interest in activities that were previously enjoyable, and pulling back from relationships and social engagement.
- **Irritability And Anger:** Disproportionate emotional reactions, particularly in driving situations, that strain relationships and affect work performance.

For example, a Georgia driver who was [rear-ended](#) at highway speed may find that months after the crash, the sound of squealing brakes sends their heart racing. They've stopped taking the interstate to work and now add 25 minutes to their commute every day to avoid the section of highway where the accident happened. They've turned down a promotion that requires driving to client sites. Their spouse has noticed they won't sit in the passenger seat anymore. None of that appears in a medical imaging report. All of it is real, documented, and legally compensable.

Driving Anxiety as a Distinct Condition

Not every crash survivor who struggles behind the wheel meets the full diagnostic criteria for PTSD. Driving anxiety, sometimes called [vehophobia](#) when it reaches phobic levels, is a distinct condition that can develop after a crash even in people who don't meet all the PTSD diagnostic thresholds.

Driving anxiety exists on a spectrum. At its milder end, it involves heightened nervousness in specific driving situations, such as merging onto highways, passing through intersections, or driving at night. At its more severe end, it becomes a condition that prevents the victim from driving at all, requiring them to rely on others for transportation, limiting their employment

options, and shrinking their daily life in ways that carry both practical and financial consequences.

Research published in peer-reviewed literature found that 25 percent of crash survivors avoided vehicle use for up to four months following the accident. For some, that avoidance never fully resolves without therapeutic intervention, and for others, it resolves partially but leaves a lasting reduction in comfort and confidence behind the wheel that affects quality of life indefinitely.

How Psychological Injuries Are Documented in a Georgia Injury Claim

Insurance companies dismiss psychological injuries when they're not documented, which is precisely why documentation matters so much. A Georgia car accident attorney who understands the full scope of a client's harm will work to build a comprehensive psychological injury record that gives the claim the evidentiary foundation it needs.

The key elements of that documentation include:

- **A Formal PTSD Or Anxiety Diagnosis From A Mental Health Professional:** A licensed psychologist or psychiatrist who evaluates the victim using standardized diagnostic criteria and produces a written record of the diagnosis, symptom severity, and treatment recommendations.
- **Consistent Ongoing Treatment Records:** Therapy session notes, medication records, and follow-up evaluations that document the persistence of symptoms over time and the treatment required to address them.
- **A Functional Impact Assessment:** Documentation of how the psychological injury has affected the victim's ability to work, drive, maintain relationships, and engage in activities they previously enjoyed.
- **Expert Testimony:** In cases where the psychological injury is contested, a forensic psychologist or psychiatrist may testify about the diagnosis, its connection to the crash, and its expected long-term impact on the victim's life.
- **The Victim's Own Account:** A detailed, contemporaneous [record of symptoms](#), triggers, and functional limitations kept by the victim from the time symptoms first appear. Courts and juries take personal accounts seriously when they are specific, consistent, and supported by professional documentation.

What Psychological Injuries Are Worth in a Georgia Injury Case

Georgia law recognizes emotional distress and psychological harm as compensable damages in a personal injury case. A victim who develops PTSD or significant driving anxiety after a crash caused by someone else's negligence can pursue compensation for the cost of mental health treatment, the [lost wages](#) and [earning capacity](#) that result from psychological limitations, and the pain and suffering associated with living with a psychological condition that changed the way they experience daily life.

Under [Georgia's comparative negligence framework](#), the full value of psychological damages depends on how well they're documented and how effectively they're presented. Insurance companies routinely attempt to minimize psychological injury claims by arguing that the victim's symptoms are exaggerated, pre-existing, or unconnected to the crash. Having legal representation that understands how to counter those arguments is the difference between recovering full compensation and walking away with a settlement that ignores a significant part of what the crash actually cost.

[SB 68's changes](#) to how non-economic damages are argued at trial make this even more critical. Restrictions on how attorneys can frame the dollar value of pain and suffering during trial means that the evidentiary foundation supporting psychological injury claims has to be stronger and more precisely documented than it needed to be before April 2025.

Georgia's Billion Dollar Car Wreck Lawyer Sees the Full Picture

Physical injuries are only part of what a serious car accident takes from its victims. The Law Offices of Gary Martin Hays & Associates, P.C. has been fighting for injured Georgians since 1993, and we know how to build claims that reflect the full scope of what our clients have lost, including what happens after the physical wounds heal and the psychological ones remain.

If you were seriously injured in a Georgia car accident and you're struggling with PTSD, driving anxiety, or other psychological symptoms, [contact us today](#) for a free consultation with an experienced Atlanta car accident lawyer. We handle every case on a [contingency fee basis](#), which means there are no upfront costs and our fee comes only from the compensation we recover for you.