



ADJUSTMENT DISORDERS



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A person's response to a stressful life event (sometimes called a stressor) is out of proportion to what would be a normal reaction. The person is unable to adjust, and this causes problems in both social and work (or school) situations or other functions of daily living.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Symptoms or behavior changes occur within three months of onset of the stressor. They last no more than six months after the end of the stressor.
- Symptoms vary from person to person. They are often more severe in teens and the elderly.
- Changes in sleeping and eating patterns.
- Withdrawn (avoids social activities and friends).
- Fearful about the future.
- Low self-esteem and feeling emotionally numb.
- Feeling tense, anxious, and depressed.
- Feelings of fear, rage, guilt, or shame.
- Denial of the stressful event (acting as if it never occurred).

CAUSES

A disruption in the normal process of adapting to a stressful event. Everyone reacts differently to an event. Reactions depend on the event's importance and its intensity. It also depends on the person's personality, temperament, age, and well-being.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- The degree of undesired change a stressor causes.
- Whether the stressor was sudden or expected.
- The importance of the stressor in the person's life.
- Lack of support systems (e.g., family, friends, religious, cultural, and social ties).
- How well a person responds to stressful life events.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

No specific preventive measures known.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

It usually clears up on its own by the person adapting to the changed situation, or the stressor ends. Treatment can help in other cases. These disorders are common and are often only temporary.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Difficulty maintaining relationships or jobs.
- Lingering problems in teenagers.
- Self-treatment using alcohol or drugs to overcome undesired symptoms and feelings.
- Chronic anxiety and depression.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about your symptoms and the changes that are going on in your life. It is important to identify the stressor that has led to the symptoms. It can be anything that is important to you. The stressor may be only one event, or a string of events. It may seem minor to some, but is important to you.
- Treatment may include self-care, counseling, and, in some cases, drugs. This depends on severity of symptoms and impact on lifestyle.
- Learn to cope with stress. Keeping a journal about your stressors and feelings, talking to a friend, or joining a support group may help. Take good care of your physical health (diet, exercise, sleep).
- Counseling or psychotherapy may be recommended. Several therapy methods are effective and are often needed for a brief period. Family therapy (including marital counseling) may be recommended for some.

MEDICATIONS

Since adjustment disorders are usually of short duration, drugs are normally not needed. A drug may be prescribed in the short term for insomnia or for other specific symptoms, depending on their severity.

ACTIVITY

No limits. A routine physical exercise program is recommended. Physical activity helps reduce anxiety and stress.

DIET

Eat a well-balanced diet to maintain good health.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of an adjustment disorder.
- Symptoms continue to worsen after treatment begins.

