

**REVIEWED***By Chris Tighe at 12:32 pm, Dec 11, 2017*[Home](#) → [Medical Encyclopedia](#) → Adjustment disorderURL of this page: [//medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000932.htm](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000932.htm)

Adjustment disorder

Adjustment disorder is a group of symptoms, such as stress, feeling sad or hopeless, and physical symptoms that can occur after you go through a stressful life event.

The symptoms occur because you are having a hard time coping. Your reaction is stronger than expected for the type of event that occurred.

Causes

Many different events may trigger symptoms of an adjustment disorder. Whatever the trigger is, the event may become too much for you.

Stressors for people of any age include:

- Death of a loved one
- Divorce or problems with a relationship
- General life changes
- Illness or other health issues in yourself or a loved one
- Moving to a different home or a different city
- Unexpected catastrophes
- Worries about money

Triggers of stress in teenagers and young adults may include:

- Family problems or conflict
- School problems
- Sexuality issues

There is no way to predict which people who are affected by the same stress are likely to develop adjustment disorder. Your social skills before the event, and how you have learned to deal with stress in the past may play roles.

Symptoms

Symptoms of adjustment disorder are often severe enough to affect work or social life. Symptoms include:

- Acting defiant or showing impulsive behavior
- Acting nervous or tense
- Crying, feeling sad or hopeless, and possibly withdrawing from other people
- Skipped heartbeats and other physical complaints
- Trembling or twitching

To have adjustment disorder, you must have the following:

- The symptoms clearly come after a stressor, most often within 3 months
- The symptoms are more severe than would be expected
- There do not appear to be other disorders involved
- The symptoms are not part of normal grieving for the death of a loved one

Sometimes, symptoms can be severe and the person may have thoughts of suicide or make a suicide attempt.

Exams and Tests

Your health care provider will do a mental health assessment to find out about your behavior and symptoms. You may be referred to a psychiatrist to confirm the diagnosis.

Treatment

The main goal of treatment is to relieve symptoms and help you return to a similar level of functioning as before the stressful event occurred.

Most mental health professionals recommend some type of talk therapy. This type of therapy can help you identify or change your responses to the stressors in your life.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a type of talk therapy. It can help you deal with your feelings:

- First the therapist helps you recognize the negative feelings and thoughts that occur.
- Then the therapist teaches you how to change these into helpful thoughts and healthy actions.

Other types of therapy may include:

- Long-term therapy, where you will explore your thoughts and feelings over many months or more
- Family therapy, where you will meet with a therapist along with your family
- Self-help groups, where the support of others may help you get better

Medicines may be used, but only along with talk therapy. These medicines may help if you are:

- Nervous or anxious most of the time
- Not sleeping very well
- Very sad or depressed

Outlook (Prognosis)

With the right help and support, you should get better quickly. The problem usually does not last longer than 6 months, unless the stressor continues to be present.

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Call for an appointment with your provider if you develop symptoms of adjustment disorder.

References

American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*. 5th ed. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing. 2013.

Powell AD. Grief, bereavement, and adjustment disorders. In: Stern TA, Fava M, Wilens TE, Rosenbaum JF, eds. *Massachusetts General Hospital Comprehensive Clinical Psychiatry*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2016:chap 38.

Strain JJ, Friedman MJ. Adjustment disorders. In: Gabbard GO, ed. *Gabbard's Treatments of Psychiatric Disorders*. 5th ed. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing; 2014:chap 29.

Review Date 2/2/2016

Updated by: Fred K. Berger, MD, addiction and forensic psychiatrist, Scripps Memorial Hospital, La Jolla, CA. Also reviewed by David Zieve, MD, MHA, Isla Ogilvie, PhD, and the A.D.A.M. Editorial team.



A.D.A.M., Inc. is accredited by URAC, also known as the American Accreditation HealthCare Commission (www.urac.org). URAC's [accreditation program](#) is an independent audit to verify that A.D.A.M. follows rigorous standards of quality and accountability. A.D.A.M. is among the first to achieve this important distinction for online health information and services. Learn more about A.D.A.M.'s [editorial policy](#), [editorial process](#) and [privacy policy](#). A.D.A.M. is also a founding member of Hi-Ethics and subscribes to the principles of the Health on the Net Foundation (www.hon.ch).

The information provided herein should not be used during any medical emergency or for the diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. A licensed physician should be consulted for diagnosis and treatment of any and all medical conditions. Call 911 for all medical emergencies. Links to other sites are provided for information only -- they do not constitute endorsements of those other sites. Copyright 1997-2017, A.D.A.M., Inc. Duplication for commercial use must be authorized in writing by ADAM Health Solutions.

U.S. National Library of Medicine 8600 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20894 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

National Institutes of Health

Page last updated: 05 December 2017

Drag to outliner or Upload

Close