

Adjustment Disorder

Adjustment Disorder is a diagnosis that is triggered by a stressful event. It is characterized as a psychological response to stress or stressors that result in clinically significant emotional or behavioral symptoms. Individuals diagnosed with Adjustment Disorder who are struggling with a stressor may experience a decrease in performance at school or work, suicide attempts or suicidal ideations, substance use, changes in relationships, and somatic complaints. Somatic complaints are complaints about the body including pain, nausea, headaches and body aches, which often have no medical explanation. The reaction to the stressful event must also be "marked by distress that is in excess of what would be expected given the nature of the stressor" or show a "significant impairment in social or occupational functioning."



With Adjustment Disorder, the emotional or behavioral symptoms must develop within three months from the onset of the stressor. Symptoms may be present for several weeks and may last up to several months. The duration of symptoms for Adjustment Disorder may be considered acute, which is less than six months, or chronic, which is longer than six months. The disorder may be diagnosed in any age group. During childhood and adolescence, Adjustment

Disorder is equally common between males and females. However, in adults, women are diagnosed twice as often as men. The prevalence of Adjustment Disorder has been reported between two percent and eight percent of adults and children but for individuals who are hospitalized the rate is increased to about 12

percent. Examples of stressors are:

- Single events like a termination of a friendly or romantic relationship
- Multiple stressors that may include business difficulties or marital problems
- Recurrent stressors including seasonal problems at work
- Continuous stressor like living in an area where there is frequent crime
- Developmental events which may include getting married, becoming a parent, or going away to school.

Adjusting and coping with problems is a common occurrence and is often associated with other mental illnesses. Adjustment Disorder may also progress to a more severe mental disorder including major depression, but the progression is more common in children and adolescence than in adults. Individuals with a personality disorder are often not diagnosed with Adjustment

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Important Numbers to Remember

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Disorder because the nature of personality disorders are often exacerbated by stress. There must also be an identifiable stressful event to be diagnosed with Adjustment Disorder, if no event is identified a more appropriate diagnosis may be a not otherwise specified disorder, such as Anxiety Disorder. Also, a notable difference from other disorders that are triggered by stress is that Adjustment Disorder can be triggered by a stressor of any severity and individual exhibit a wide range of possible symptoms. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Acute Stress Disorder require the presence of an extreme stressor and a "specific constellation of symptoms."

Subtypes and specifiers of Adjustment Disorder include: with depressed mood, with anxiety, with mixed anxiety and depressed mood, with disturbances of conduct, with mixed disturbances of emotions and conduct, and unspecified. Individuals may present with several symptoms and complaints and it is



Marsha Phillips

Acute, Inpatient Psychiatry/
Geropsychiatry
(989) 466-3304

Will Thomas

Supervisor, Psychiatric
Partial Hospitalization and
Editor of *Mental Health Matters*
(989) 466-3253
Toll free (800) 392-7652

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important, as with all disorders, to make an accurate diagnosis. It is important when treating someone with an Adjustment Disorder to keep in mind that their symptoms may be short term and often respond to medications and therapy. Often therapy can be effective in dealing with stressful events by discussing ways to cope with the stress, and also to identify support systems that may when dealing with stress.

Katie J. Wilson, M.A.

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Forth Edition, Text Revision. Washington, DC, American Psychiatric Association, 2000.