



Patient education: Adjustment disorder (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

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What is adjustment disorder?

Adjustment disorder is a mental health disorder that can happen after a stressful life event. Not everyone who experiences a stressful event goes through adjustment disorder. But some people do. For example, adjustment disorder might happen after:

- The death of a loved one
- Divorce, or other relationship problems
- You or a loved one getting a serious illness
- Moving to a new home or city
- A change in your financial situation, or money problems
- Problems at work

For children and teens, adjustment disorder might also be caused by:

- Family problems, or fighting within the family
- Problems in school
- Sexuality or identity issues

Doctors diagnose adjustment disorder only if a person's symptoms do **not** match another major mental health disorder, such as depression or anxiety.

What are the symptoms of adjustment disorder?

Symptoms of adjustment disorder start within 3 months of the stressful event. They are usually more severe than would be expected.

Symptoms might include:

- Low mood, or feeling hopeless
 - Tearfulness, or crying spells
 - Having trouble talking to or being around others
 - Being unable to do your usual tasks
 - Feeling worried, nervous, or afraid
 - Not thinking clearly
 - Feeling overwhelmed or stressed
 - Acting recklessly
 - Thoughts of suicide
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Should I see a doctor or nurse?

If you have the symptoms listed above and they are affecting your life, talk to your doctor or nurse. They can help you.

Get help right away if you are thinking of hurting or killing yourself!

If you ever feel like you might hurt yourself or someone else, help is available:

- In the US, contact the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:
 - To speak to someone, call or text **988**.
 - To talk to someone online, go to www.988lifeline.org/chat.
 - Call your doctor or nurse, and tell them that it is urgent.
 - Call for an ambulance (in the US and Canada, call 9-1-1).
 - Go to the emergency department at the nearest hospital.
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How is adjustment disorder treated?

Adjustment disorder is usually treated with counseling. This means talking with a psychiatrist, psychologist, nurse, or social worker. They can help you understand what is causing your symptoms and how to deal with them. It might also help to find a support group for people who are dealing with something similar.

In some cases, your doctor or nurse might prescribe medicines that can:

- Improve your mood
- Help with worry
- Help you sleep

If you are having trouble coping with adjustment disorder, talk to your doctor or nurse.

Is there anything I can do on my own to feel better?

It might help to:

- Have a support system – Talk to your family and friends about how you are feeling. Sharing your thoughts can help you work through problems or see things from a new point of view.
- Manage your stress – Try to find time to rest and relax. For example, you could try a new hobby like doing puzzles or painting. You can also try activities like yoga, tai chi, or meditation to help lower your stress.
- Move your body – Getting regular physical activity can help your mood. Even gentle forms of exercise, like walking, are good for you.
- Journal – Writing down your thoughts and feelings might help you feel better.
- Accept that some things are out of your control – Focus on what you can change. For example, if your stress is caused by how you are treated by your boss, you can't change their behavior. But you might be able to look for a new job.
- Eat a healthy diet – A healthy diet includes lots of vegetables, fruits, beans, nuts, and whole grains. Limit red or processed meats, unhealthy fats, sugar, salt, and alcohol.
- Avoid unhealthy ways of coping – Drinking lots of alcohol or using drugs like cocaine or heroin can make your symptoms worse. If you are using these methods to cope, be honest with your doctor or nurse. They are there to help you, and are required by law to keep conversations with you private.

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Patient education: Depression treatment options for children and adolescents (Beyond the Basics)

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