



# Disability Awareness Begins With You:

## *Adjustment Disorder*

### **What is an adjustment disorder and how does it occur?**

There are six major adjustment disorders:

- Adjustment disorder with depressed mood;
- Adjustment disorder with anxiety;
- Adjustment disorder with mixed anxiety and depressed mood;
- Adjustment disorder with disturbance of conduct;
- Adjustment disorder with mixed disturbance of emotions and conduct;
- Adjustment disorder unspecified.

### **What are the characteristics associated with an adjustment disorder?**

A person with adjustment disorder often experiences feelings of depression or anxiety or combined depression and anxiety. As a result, that person may act out behaviorally against the "rules and regulations" of family, work, or society. In some people, an adjustment disorder may manifest itself in such behaviors as skipping school, unexpected fighting, recklessness, or legal problems. Other people, however, instead of acting out, may tend to withdraw socially and isolate themselves during their adjustment problems. Still others may not experience behavioral disturbances, but will begin to suffer from physical illness. If someone is already suffering from a medical illness, that condition may worsen during the time of the adjustment disorder. People in the midst of adjustment disorders often do poorly in school or at work. Very commonly they begin to have more difficulty in their close, personal relationships.

Listed below are some of the characteristics associated with adjustment disorders:

- A person with an adjustment disorder with depressed mood may have mostly a depressed mood, hopeless feelings, and crying spells.

- A person with an adjustment disorder with anxiety would experience anxious feelings, nervousness, and worry.
- Someone with an adjustment disorder with mixed anxiety and depressed mood would, obviously, have a mixture of anxious and depressed feelings.
- An individual with an adjustment disorder with disturbance of conduct may act out inappropriately. This person may act out against society, skip school, or begin to have trouble with the police.
- A person with an adjustment disorder with mixed disturbance of emotions and conduct would have a mixture of emotional and conduct problems.

### **Do adjustment disorders affect males, females, or both?**

In the United States the same number of males and females experience the various adjustment disorders.

### **At what age can an adjustment disorder appear?**

Adjustment disorders can occur at any age. People are particularly vulnerable during normal transitional periods such as adolescence, mid-life, and late life.

### **How often does adjustment disorder appear in the community?**

Adjustment disorder is very common in the United States. More than five percent (5%) of all persons seen in clinical, outpatient mental health settings have some type of adjustment disorder.

### **How is an adjustment disorder diagnosed?**

A mental health professional makes a diagnosis of an adjustment disorder by taking a careful personal history from the client/patient. It is important to the therapist to learn the details that surround the stressful event or events in that person's life. No laboratory tests are required to make a diagnosis of adjustment disorder nor are there any physical conditions that must be met.

However, it is very important for the therapist not to overlook a physical illness that might mimic or contribute to a psychological disorder. If there is any question whether the individual might have a physical problem, the mental health professional should recommend a complete physical examination by a medical doctor. Laboratory tests might be necessary as a part of the physical workup.

### **What happens to a person with an adjustment disorder?**

The conditions associated with adjustment disorder develop within three months of the beginning of the stressful problem. An adjustment disorder usually lasts no longer than three to six months. The condition may persist, however, if an individual is suffering from chronic stress such as that caused by an illness, a difficult relationship, or worsening financial problems.

### **How is an adjustment disorder treated?**

Therapy can be very helpful to lessen or alleviate ongoing symptoms of adjustment disorder before they become disabling.

Group therapy can be useful to individuals who are enduring similar stress.

In some situations the use of prescription medications can be very useful to ease the depression or the anxiety associated with adjustment disorder.

### **What can people do if they need help?**

If you, a friend, or a family member would like more information and you have a therapist or a physician, please discuss your concerns with that person.

Information provided by: [www.athealth.com](http://www.athealth.com)