

## ADJUSTMENT DISORDERS



### BASIC INFORMATION

#### DESCRIPTION

Excessive emotional or behavioral symptoms in response to a stressful situation in one's life. The individual is unable to adjust as expected to changes in life, which in turn causes impaired functioning in daily life.

#### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- There must be an identifiable stressor. It may seem minor, or even positive, such as a job promotion, or negative, as with a small financial loss.
- The symptoms or behavior changes occur within 3 months of onset of the stressor and last no more than 6 months after the end of the stressor.
- Other psychological disorders are not present (e.g., major depression, anxiety disorder, personality disorder, etc.).
- Symptoms vary from person to person (often more severe in adolescents and the elderly) and include sleeping problems, restlessness, irritability, loss of concentration, fatigue, increased startle reaction, tension, depression, anxiety, withdrawal and inhibition. There can be feelings of fear, rage, guilt and shame, and denial of the stressful event (acting as if it never occurred).

#### CAUSES

A disruption in the normal process of adapting to a stressful event.

#### RISK INCREASES WITH

- The degree of undesirable change a stressor causes.
- Whether the stressor was sudden or expected.
- The unique importance of the stressor in the individual's life.
- Lack of support systems (e.g., family, friends, religious, cultural and social ties).
- The degree of vulnerability of the individual to stressful life experiences.

#### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- No specific preventive measures known.

#### EXPECTED OUTCOME

- Usually resolved by adapting to the changed situation, or the stressor ends. Treatment can help in cases where self-care does not alleviate the symptoms. These disorders are common and usually temporary.

#### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

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



### TREATMENT

#### GENERAL MEASURES

- Self-care, psychotherapy and, in some cases, medications, depending on severity of disorder and impact on lifestyle.
- For family/friends—Helping the person adapt to and cope with the event and helping foster a change to prevent a recurrence.
- For yourself—Learning to cope with stress, keeping a journal about your stressors and feelings, talking to a friend, joining a support group, and taking good care of your physical health (diet, exercise, sleep).
- Psychotherapy—Several therapy methods are effective and are often needed for a brief period. Family therapy (including marital counseling) may be recommended for some.

#### MEDICATION

Since adjustment disorders are usually of short duration, medications are normally not necessary. A medication may be prescribed short term for insomnia or for other specific symptoms, depending on their severity.

#### ACTIVITY

No restrictions. A routine physical exercise program is recommended. Physical exertion helps reduce anxiety and stress.

#### DIET

Eat a nutritionally balanced diet to maintain optimum health.



### NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of an adjustment disorder.
- Symptoms continue to worsen after treatment is started.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.