

Adjustment Disorder with Depressed Mood

KEY POINTS

- An adjustment disorder with depressed mood means that you feel hopeless and sadder than would be expected after a stressful event.
 - Treatment may include medicines, therapy, and learning ways to manage stress. In severe cases, you may need to be treated in the hospital.
 - If you are depressed and feel that you could hurt yourself or someone else, call your healthcare provider or therapist right away.
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What is adjustment disorder with depressed mood?

An adjustment disorder with depressed mood means that you feel hopeless and sadder than would be expected after a stressful event. Many kinds of events can cause stress including moving, changing schools or jobs, getting married, having a child, losing an important relationship, or coping with a severe illness.

Stressful events happen to everyone and it's normal to get upset. It's considered an adjustment disorder only when the distress you feel is greater than what is normally expected or when it causes problems in your daily life.

What is the cause?

An adjustment disorder is a way of reacting to stress. When you have an adjustment disorder, you feel depressed starting within 3 months after the event, and usually get better in 6 months or less.

The exact cause of this disorder is not known. Possible causes include:

- The brain makes chemicals that affect thoughts, emotions, and actions. Without the right balance of these chemicals, there may be problems with the way you think, feel, or act. People with this disorder may have too little or too much of some of these chemicals.
- Depression disorders tend to run in families. It is not known if this is caused by genes passed from parent to child. It may also be that parents have a negative outlook, and children learn this behavior from the parents.
- Problems in your family when you were growing up may increase your risk. If your family moved often, you were abused, or felt that you had no control, you may have trouble coping with stress.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Being more upset than would normally be expected
- Being unable to deal with things at work, at school, or socially

- Feeling sad and uninterested in things you usually enjoy
- Having trouble falling asleep, waking up very early, or sleeping more than usual
- Not being able to concentrate or remember things

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider or therapist will ask about your symptoms. Your provider will check for a medical illness or drug or alcohol problem that could cause the symptoms.

How is it treated?

Adjustment disorders may be treated with therapy, medicine, or both. Usually you need therapy and medicine for a short time only.

Therapy

Individual, group, and family therapy may offer support, help reduce fears and worries, and help improve your mood. Support groups are very helpful.

Medicine

Medicine may be prescribed to help reduce symptoms of depression and help you cope with stress.

How can I take care of myself?

- Get support. Talk with family and friends. Consider joining a support group in your area. Try to understand what made you start to feel this way. Understanding how stress has affected you is one of the most important things you can do for yourself.
- Learn to manage stress. Ask for help at home and work when the load is too great to handle. Find ways to relax. For example, take up a hobby, listen to music, watch movies, or take walks. Try yoga, meditation, or deep breathing exercises when you feel stressed.
- Take care of your physical health. Try to get at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Eat a variety of healthy foods. Limit caffeine. If you smoke or use e-cigarettes, try to quit. Avoid alcohol and drugs, because they can make your symptoms worse. Stay physically active as advised by your provider.
- Check your medicines. To help prevent problems, tell your healthcare provider and pharmacist about all the medicines, natural remedies, vitamins, and other supplements that you take.
- Contact your healthcare provider or therapist if you have any questions or your symptoms seem to be getting worse.

Get emergency care if you or a loved one have serious thoughts of suicide or harming others.

For more information, contact:

- National Institute of Mental Health
866-615-6464
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>
- Mental Health America
800-969-6642
<https://www.mhanational.org>

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