

# Adjustment Disorder

Adjustment Disorder is a mental health condition that occurs when a person has difficulty coping with a **significant life stressor or change**. This leaflet provides general information about adjustment disorder and how it is understood in psychiatric care.

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## What Is Adjustment Disorder?

Adjustment disorder involves:

- Emotional or behavioural symptoms
- That arise in response to an identifiable stressor
- And are out of proportion to what would usually be expected

The distress causes difficulty with daily functioning but does not meet criteria for another mental health disorder.

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## Common Stressors

Adjustment disorder may occur after events such as:

- Relationship breakdown
- Workplace stress or job loss
- Health problems or medical diagnoses
- Financial difficulties
- Legal, WorkCover, or compensation-related stress
- Major life transitions

The stressor may be a single event or ongoing.

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## Common Symptoms

Symptoms may include:

- Low mood or tearfulness
- Anxiety or excessive worry
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Irritability or frustration
- Sleep disturbance

- Difficulty concentrating
- Reduced motivation

Symptoms usually begin within **weeks of the stressor**.

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## How Adjustment Disorder Affects Daily Life

Adjustment disorder can affect:

- Work performance
- Relationships
- Decision-making
- Coping capacity

Although symptoms can be distressing, they are often **time-limited**.

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## Adjustment Disorder Is Not a Personal Failure

Adjustment disorder reflects:

- A mismatch between demands and coping capacity
- The impact of stress on mental health

It does **not** mean a person is weak, incapable, or permanently unwell.

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## Diagnosis and Assessment

Diagnosis is based on:

- Clinical assessment
- Identification of a clear stressor
- Timing and pattern of symptoms
- Impact on functioning

Symptoms typically resolve as the stressor is addressed or coping improves.

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## Treatment Approaches

Treatment may include:

- Supportive psychological strategies
- Stress management and problem-solving
- Short-term medication where appropriate
- Addressing practical contributors to stress

Treatment focuses on restoring coping and functioning.

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## Course and Recovery

Adjustment disorder is usually:

- Time-limited
- Responsive to support
- Associated with good recovery

Symptoms often improve within months, especially when stressors are reduced or managed more effectively.

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## Adjustment Disorder and Work

Work capacity may be:

- Temporarily affected
- Improved with adjustments or reduced stress

Gradual return to usual functioning is often appropriate and reviewed over time.

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## When Symptoms Persist

If symptoms:

- Worsen
- Persist beyond expected timeframes
- Begin to resemble another condition

Further assessment may be needed.

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## When to Seek Help

Professional support is recommended if:

- Distress is significant
- Functioning is impaired
- Coping strategies are no longer effective

Early support can prevent symptoms from becoming more entrenched.

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## Summary

Adjustment disorder is a common and understandable response to significant life stress. With appropriate support, most people recover and regain their usual level of functioning.

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