Adjustment difficulty in one page

What it is

What is an adjustment disorder?

An adjustment disorder is a strong reaction to a stressful life change, such as losing a job or a breakup, that makes life hard to manage. It starts soon after the change and usually eases within months. A GP, psychologist or psychiatrist can diagnose it.

- An adjustment disorder follows a stressful change
- It is stronger than most people expect to feel
- It usually eases once the stress settles

The signs

What are the symptoms of an adjustment disorder?

Symptoms of an adjustment disorder include constant worry about a stressful change, going over it again and again, low mood, tension and trouble coping with work or home. They start within weeks of the change and are stronger than most people would expect to feel.

- Constant worry about a stressful change is a sign
- Going over the event again and again is common

Where to start

How do the 6 sessions and the 10 a year work?

You get up to 6 individual sessions on your first referral. Then your GP reviews your plan and can refer you again, up to 10 individual and 10 group sessions a calendar year. The count starts again each year, and the plan itself does not expire. Up to 2 sessions can go to a family member or carer.

- Up to 6 sessions on your first referral
- A GP review can take you to 10 sessions a year
- The count starts again each calendar year

Treatment

How long is the wait, and can I shorten it?

No government agency measures how long you wait to see a psychologist, so there is no official number. In one 2022 survey, GPs estimated a median wait of 45 days for teenagers with depression or anxiety, so it is not a figure for stress. There is no reliable figure for a GP long appointment. Free services with no referral, and psychologist sessions by video or phone, which Medicare pays the same as in-room, can lawfully shorten it.

- No government agency measures the wait

Medication

Medicine or therapy first?

Talking therapy usually comes first. For adjustment disorder, guidance names brief psychological therapy as the first-line treatment. Medicine is added only when symptoms are severe, last a long time or stop you coping. For depression, the Australian psychiatry guideline says everyone should be offered structured psychological treatment. Any medicine decision is made with your doctor.

- Talking therapy usually comes first
- Medicine is added, not the starting point

What it costs

What does Medicare cover?

Two things do most of the work. A mental health treatment plan from your GP covers part of the cost of up to 10 individual sessions a year with a mental health professional. A psychiatrist's item 291 assessment has a schedule fee of $549.90, and Medicare pays back $467.45. Clinicians set their own fees, so there is often a gap.

- A treatment plan covers part of 10 sessions

In danger? Call 000. Lifeline 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14, or chat online.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.

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From haihealth.au/blog/adjustment-stress, 31 October 2026