

## Acute Stress Disorder

Acute stress disorder is described as a psychological condition that occurs in response to going through or witnessing a traumatic event. Trauma can be defined in two ways - medically and psychologically. Medically, trauma is defined as a bodily injury or shock. Psychologically, trauma is defined as an emotionally distressing event. It is common for individuals to experience a lot of guilt about not being able to prevent the trauma, or for not being able to move on from the trauma more quickly.

## Signs & Symptoms

Symptoms of acute stress disorder can occur for three days to one month. For about a month after the trauma, it is common for panic attacks to occur. Acute stress disorder may be diagnosed if other mental disorders or medical conditions cannot provide a better explanation for the person's symptoms. Children may also experience anxiety when separated from their caregivers. Symptoms fall into five categories:

- **Intrusion symptoms** - involuntary and invasive painful memories of the trauma.
- **Negative mood** - steady inability to experience happy or joyful emotions.
- **Dissociative symptoms** - seeing oneself from an outside perspective or experiencing a sense that time slows.
- **Avoidance symptoms** - avoiding people, places or memories associated with the trauma.
- **Arousal symptoms** - easily irritated, trouble sleeping, or trouble concentrating.

## Risk Factors

Anyone is at risk for developing acute stress disorder, but individuals have an increased risk who have:

- Experienced or witnessed more than one traumatic event
- A mental health disorder
- An avoidance coping style when distressed
- A history of traumatic events, especially having dissociative symptoms then the events occur

## Diagnosis & Treatment

A primary care physician or mental health care provider can diagnose an individual with acute distress disorder by asking questions, but will also need to rule out medication interaction, drug use and other psychiatric issues. Treatment plans can consist of therapy and medications. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has had the most success in combating acute stress disorder. CBT has two main components: 1) It primarily aims to change situational understandings or thought patterns surrounding the traumatic incident; and 2) it aims to alter behaviors in anxiety provoking situations. Cognitive behavioral therapy not only attempts to alleviate the symptoms of acute stress disorder, but also attempts to prevent the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

**If you or someone you know has experienced a recent traumatic event and needs to talk, please call our 24-Hour Helpline at 1.800.928.8000. We can help.**

Source – Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/conditions/acute-stress-disorder>