

Understanding Acute Stress Disorder

In this material, we will explore the various aspects of Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) to help you better understand and manage the condition.

Defining Acute Stress Disorder (ASD)

Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) is a psychological condition that can develop after a person experiences a traumatic event. It causes distressing symptoms, such as flashbacks, nightmares, and anxiety, that commonly show up within three days to four weeks after the traumatic experience.



Difference Between ASD and PTSD

ASD occurs within the first month after a trauma, while Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms last much longer. PTSD is diagnosed when symptoms persist for more than a month.

Understanding Stress and Trauma

Stress	Trauma
A natural response to challenging or threatening situations. It can manifest as physical, emotional or psychological tension and is a normal part of life.	Refers to an event or series of events that are emotionally or physically distressing and overwhelming. Traumatic experiences can have lasting impact on mental health.

How Trauma Can Lead to ASD

Trauma can overwhelm a person's ability to cope. This disrupts the mind's ability to process the event, hence leading to the development of ASD symptoms.

Symptoms of ASD

Understanding the symptoms associated with ASD is crucial for recognising and managing the condition effectively.

Intrusive Symptoms

Having distressing and unwanted memories, nightmares, and flashbacks related to the traumatic event.



Negative Mood and Cognition Symptoms

Experiencing persistent negative emotions, guilt, and distorted beliefs about the event.



Dissociation Symptoms

A sense of detachment from reality or feeling that the world is unreal.



Avoidance Symptoms

Deliberate efforts to avoid reminders of the traumatic events, such as avoiding places, people, or activities associated with it.



Arousal and Reactivity Symptoms

Experiencing heightened alertness, irritability, difficulty concentrating, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle responses and sleep disturbances.



Duration and Timing of Symptoms

ASD symptoms typically occur within three days to four weeks after the traumatic experience.



Causes and Risk Factors of ASD

Understanding causes and risks factors helps individuals become more aware of the potential for ASD and take preventive steps.

Common Causes of ASD	ASD is often caused by traumatic events, such as accidents, natural disasters and situations where someone experiences violence or sees it happening to others. These events may be upsetting and stressful to the individual, hence leading to ASD.
Risk Factors	Someone who has existing mental health conditions, gone through trauma in childhood and limited social support are at a higher risk of developing ASD.
Protective Factors	Having strong social support, effective coping skills, and ensuring a sense of safety can reduce the risk of ASD.

Treatment Approaches for Acute Stress Disorder (ASD)

ASD can be effectively managed through various treatment approaches, including:

Early Intervention for ASD

- Actively engaging in early intervention is key to effectively managing ASD symptoms.
- Understand your reactions to trauma, explore practical coping mechanisms to help manage the stress and anxiety, and actively engage with friends, family and your healthcare provider (if needed) to provide emotional assistance.
- Medications and psychotherapy may be helpful in managing specific symptoms and negative thoughts and behaviours associated with the traumatic experience.

Medications

- In some cases, medication may be prescribed by a psychiatrist to manage specific symptoms such as anxiety and sleep difficulty.
- It is important to note that medication is not a “magic cure”, but it may help alleviate symptoms. There are also possible side effects, hence it is important to discuss any concern you have regarding medication with your healthcare provider.



Psychotherapy

- Psychotherapy is a collaborative process where a psychologist works with individuals in finding ways to improve their well-being.
- It involves talking with a trained psychologist in a safe and confidential setting.



Work with your healthcare provider to determine the best approach for your unique situation. It is important to communicate openly with your provider about your progress and any concerns you may have.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about ASD

Is it common to experience a recurrence of ASD symptoms every now and then?

ASD symptoms typically occur within the first month after a trauma. Recurrence of symptoms outside this period is less common, but may occur in response to triggers.

ASD is a treatable condition. It is advisable to seek help if you experience distressing symptoms. With appropriate intervention, you can work towards a brighter and more resilient future for your mental well-being.

Contributed by Psychology (Allied Health Services)

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