

## ACUTE STRESS DISORDER FACT SHEET

### What Is Acute Stress Disorder?

In the weeks after a traumatic event, you may develop an anxiety disorder called acute stress disorder (ASD). ASD typically occurs within one month of a traumatic event. It lasts at least three days and can persist for up to one month. People with ASD have symptoms similar to those seen in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

### What Causes Acute Stress Disorder?

Experiencing, witnessing, or being confronted with one or more traumatic events can cause ASD. The events create intense fear, horror, or helplessness. Traumatic events that can cause ASD include:

- death
- a threat of death to oneself or others
- a threat of serious injury to oneself or others
- a threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others

Approximately 6 to 33 percent of people who experience a traumatic event develop ASD. This rate varies based on the nature of the traumatic situation.

### Who Is at Risk for Acute Stress Disorder?

Anyone can develop ASD after a traumatic event. You may have an increased risk of developing ASD if you have:

- experienced, witnessed, or been confronted with a traumatic event in the past
- a history of ASD or PTSD
- a history of certain types of mental problems
- a history of dissociative symptoms during traumatic events

### What Are the Symptoms of Acute Stress Disorder?

#### Dissociative Symptoms

You'll have three or more of the following dissociative symptoms if you have ASD:

- feeling numb, detached, or being emotionally unresponsive
- a reduced awareness of your surroundings
- derealization, which occurs when your environment seems strange or unreal to you
- depersonalization, which occurs when your thoughts or emotions don't seem real or don't seem like they belong to you
- dissociative amnesia, which occurs when you cannot remember one or more important aspects of the traumatic event

#### Reexperiencing the Traumatic Event

You'll persistently reexperience the traumatic event in one or more of the following ways if you have ASD:

- having recurring images, thoughts, nightmares, illusions, or flashback episodes of the traumatic event
- feeling like you're reliving the traumatic event
- feeling distressed when something reminds you of the traumatic event

#### Avoidance

You may avoid stimuli that cause you to remember or reexperience the traumatic event, such as:

- people
- conversations
- places
- objects
- activities
- thoughts
- feelings

#### Anxiety or Increased Arousal

The symptoms of ASD may include anxiety and increased arousal. The symptoms of anxiety and increased arousal include:

- having trouble sleeping
- being irritable
- having difficulty concentrating
- being unable to stop moving or sit still
- being constantly tense or on guard
- becoming startled too easily or at inappropriate times

#### Distress

The symptoms of ASD may cause you distress or disrupt important aspects of your life, such as your social or work settings. You may have an inability to start or complete necessary tasks or an inability to tell others about the traumatic event.