

Sleepless in Dubai? Maybe love; maybe it's AD!

No sleep, no appetite, no enthusiasm for what's happening around you? Maybe you're in love, and congratulations are in order! Or maybe it's not that simple. You have been undergoing stress for a long time, and you're now displaying symptoms of Adjustment Disorder - in which case it's better to address it.

"Adjustment Disorder (AD) is a condition wherein your stress reaction has progressed beyond normal levels and reached a point of psychological exhaustion. Your body has started reacting differently to continually undergoing stress over long periods of time," says Dr Shankar Srinivas Kuchibatla, Consultant Psychiatrist and Medical Director at LifeWorks Foundation, Dubai.

Stress is universal - it doesn't differentiate between age, gender and socio-economic status. There's certainly no dearth of causes for stress, especially in today's world. From exam stress to peer pressure. From beating the traffic jam to meeting deadlines. From managing finances to keeping your job in these uncertain times. From the isolation that comes from living away from the family to coping with a nagging headache... There's so much on our plate at any point of time.

In the normal course of things, we find our ways of coping. We study or work extra hours, we swear and honk, we scrimp, save and budget, we take painkillers - and we move on with life. After all, who doesn't have stress, right?

Then one day, we notice (or someone else points out) that we are reacting differently to people, things and situations around us. We are unable to sleep properly or work up an appetite. We are easily annoyed, and we snap at people around us. Or we begin to tear up unexpectedly, sometimes to our embarrassment. Things that once used to excite us have lost their charm, and life seems long, hard and tiring. We begin to wonder what is happening.

"It's very likely that you are looking at Adjustment Disorder," explains Dr Shankar. "The symptoms of AD may seem very similar to those of depression or anxiety disorder. But the condition is different, and if addressed on time may not develop into a Clinical depression or an Anxiety disorder.

AD usually has a trigger - a sudden change of situation, or an event that has in some way derailed a person's normal life. "A threatened job loss, perhaps, or a financial situation that has suddenly escalated. It could even be a relationship that seems to be heading towards a breakdown or an existing physical condition that has worsened," as Dr Shankar says.

Adjustment Disorder can be managed effectively by making some lifestyle changes: simple things like exercising regularly, spending time with family and friends, or investing in some 'me time'. However, if despite all this, the condition persists, then it is best to go for an initial assessment/diagnosis. A diagnosis does not imply that you have to have therapy," Dr Shankar clarifies. "But it can help identify the mental or physiological trigger, so as to manage it more effectively."

Everyone has to go through their fair (and often unfair) share of stressful experiences, and they do leave a mark on us, for better or for worse. Stress is called 'the silent killer' for a reason: it not only affects the mind, but makes our body vulnerable to diseases as well. By taking ownership of our emotional well-being in the same spirit as we do our physical wellness, we can live a richer, happier life.