



Adjustment Disorder

Adjustment disorder is a psychological response to a significant life change or stressor, in which a person struggles to adapt emotionally or behaviourally. For UK veterans, **leaving the military** is a major transition that can trigger this condition – particularly if the discharge was unplanned or followed a traumatic event.

Symptoms of adjustment disorder in veterans may include:

- Persistent **anxiety or low mood**
- **Irritability or anger outbursts**
- **Withdrawal** from social contact
- **Difficulty concentrating** or making decisions
- **Feeling overwhelmed** or unable to cope with daily responsibilities

The civilian world often presents a drastically different environment – looser structures, ambiguous rules, and less clear-cut roles and responsibilities. Veterans may feel **frustrated by a lack of order, disillusioned by civilian values, or unsettled by a perceived lack of purpose**. These stressors can become overwhelming, especially when combined with financial pressure, housing instability, or a lack of social support.

While adjustment disorder is usually **short-term**, without appropriate intervention it can escalate into more serious conditions such as major depression, anxiety disorders, or substance misuse.

Treatment may include:

- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)**
- **Brief solution-focused therapy**
- **Peer mentoring** to support transition
- **Practical support** with housing, employment, and benefits through veteran charities

Early intervention is key. Services like **NHS Op COURAGE** and **Combat Stress** are equipped to identify and treat adjustment difficulties in the veteran population, helping individuals regain stability and build new routines.

Adjustment Disorder in UK Veterans

Adjustment disorder is a common but often under-recognised mental health condition affecting many UK veterans during their transition to civilian life. It develops in response to identifiable stressors such as leaving the armed forces, **coping with physical injury, loss of identity, or difficulties reintegrating into society**. Unlike more severe psychiatric disorders, adjustment disorder involves emotional or behavioural symptoms specifically linked to a stressful event.

Causes and Risk Factors

Veterans face a range of stressors during their transition, including changes in lifestyle, employment challenges, relationship adjustments, and coping with past trauma. The abrupt shift from the structured military environment to civilian life can be disorienting, especially for those with **limited social support** or who have experienced **combat-related trauma**. Research indicates that veterans with a history of PTSD or physical injuries are at higher risk of developing adjustment disorders.

Symptoms

Adjustment disorder symptoms generally appear within three months of a significant life event and may include:

- **Persistent sadness, anxiety, or feelings of hopelessness**
- **Difficulty concentrating** or making decisions
- **Withdrawal** from social activities or loved ones
- **Changes in sleep patterns** and **appetite**
- **Irritability** or mood swings
- **Physical complaints** such as headaches or stomach problems
- **Trouble managing daily responsibilities**

In veterans, these symptoms can hinder the transition to civilian roles and worsen social isolation.

Prevalence Among UK Veterans

While precise figures vary, studies suggest that around **15–20% of UK veterans** accessing mental health services report symptoms consistent with adjustment disorder. It is particularly prevalent among recently discharged personnel, highlighting the vulnerability during early stages of transition. Adjustment disorder may also coexist with other conditions such as depression or PTSD, complicating diagnosis and treatment.

Psychological Support and Treatment Pathways

Early recognition and intervention are key to preventing worsening mental health outcomes. In the UK, veterans have access to a range of psychological support services tailored to their unique needs:

- **NHS Veterans Mental Health Services:** Provide specialist assessments and therapies such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), trauma-focused CBT, and eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR) for coexisting trauma. These interventions aim to help veterans manage symptoms, develop coping strategies, and rebuild a sense of purpose.
- **Veterans NHS Consultation Clinics:** Offer specialist mental health evaluations to distinguish adjustment disorder from other conditions and recommend appropriate treatment plans.
- **Charity-Led Support:** Organisations such as Combat Stress, Help for Heroes, and the Royal British Legion offer counselling, peer support groups, and tailored therapy sessions, fostering community and shared understanding.
- **Veterans UK:** Assists with navigating health services, accessing benefits, and connecting veterans to mental health resources.
- **Online and Telephone Support:** Services like Veterans' Gateway provide 24/7 access to advice, crisis support, and referral to local care.

Importance of Early Intervention

Adjustment disorder is typically time-limited, but without appropriate support, symptoms can persist and lead to more severe conditions such as chronic depression or anxiety disorders. Timely psychological intervention enhances emotional resilience and supports a smoother reintegration process. Awareness campaigns and training for healthcare professionals working with veterans are essential to improve early diagnosis and access to care.

Contact Us

For more information and support, get in touch with our advisors and veterans with lived experience today.



enquiries@veteranswelfaregroup.co.uk



0330 056 0174