

# Repatriation Reaction

## Traveler Summary

### Key Points

- Repatriation is return to the home country after a significant period of international relocation. Repatriation reaction, also called "reverse culture shock" may be caused by changes in the person, the home country or the home country workplace, changes in work ethic between the 2 countries, negative financial impact (loss of subsidized housing), change in status (loss of household help and drivers), and underappreciation of experiences and knowledge gained.
- Repatriation reaction may be evidenced by changes in sleep patterns, mood, eating habits, libido, alcohol consumption, and level of tobacco or drug use. The reaction rarely results in a clinically significant disorder but, if one develops, it resolves within 6 to 12 months. If symptoms last 12 or more months, counseling is indicated.
- Prevention includes:
  - Participating in company-sponsored repatriation counseling and training programs that help identify changes in behavior as well as changes in the home culture.
  - Developing new networks of friends.
  - Using mindfulness techniques to promote relaxation.
  - Maintaining ties with other expatriate families.
  - Avoiding self-medication.

### Introduction

The repatriation process refers to the return of an expatriate employee and/or his or her family members to their home country after living and working overseas for a period of time. For some, this can be more stressful than the original expatriation and can result in a repatriation reaction (sometimes called reverse culture shock).

### Causes

Causes of repatriation reaction can include:

- An unanticipated reaction to returning to the home country that makes the symptoms more alarming
- Changes in the home country and/or the expatriate
- Differences in work ethic between the overseas and the home country cultures
- Negative changes in financial, social, or job status upon return
- Loss of domestic workers and company-provided support services for daily living
- Loss of the tight-knit expatriate community
- Lack of interest in the expatriate's experiences on the part of those who have not lived overseas
- Underappreciation of the expatriate's knowledge and skill in the workforce upon return
- Leaving for college
  - College-bound adolescents may experience a particularly challenging repatriation process, especially if they have spent a number of years schooling overseas. These students experience the triple effect of being away from their family for the first time, adjusting to the new demands of college-level courses, and repatriating, all at the same time. This adjustment may be particularly intense and last for months. Some students may relate primarily to foreign nationals or other students with expatriate experiences.

### Symptoms

Symptoms of repatriation reaction can include fluctuations in mood, changes in sleep habits (insomnia, sleeping too much, etc.), changes in libido, and changes in alcohol and/or tobacco consumption. Symptoms that persist beyond 12 months may be indicative of another disorder.

### Need for Assistance

Travelers who continue to experience trouble adjusting upon return home, in spite of repatriation training and follow-up counseling, should seek further care.

## Prevention

To help deal with repatriation, travelers should:

- Participate in company-sponsored training programs that might be offered prior to the move to assist in identifying
  - Behaviors that have changed while overseas.
  - Changes that may have occurred in the home country culture.
- Attend company-sponsored follow-up counseling sessions that might be offered (ideally at 2-, 6-, and 9-month intervals following the return home) with all family members older than 12 years.
- Develop a new support network at home.
- Learn and use relaxation techniques.
- Schedule reunions with other repatriated families.
- Avoid self-medication with alcohol, tobacco, and other substances.

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