

Psychotic depression



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Introduction

Psychotic depression occurs when a severe depressive illness has a co-existing form of psychosis. The psychosis could be hallucinations, delusions, or some other break with reality. A person who is psychotic is out of touch with reality. People with psychosis may hear “voices.” Or they may have strange and illogical ideas. For example, they may think that others can hear their thoughts or are trying to harm them. Or they might think they are the President of the republic or some other famous person.

People with psychotic depression may get angry for no apparent reason. Or they may spend a lot of time by themselves or in bed, sleeping during the day and staying awake at night. A person with psychotic depression may neglect appearance by not bathing or changing clothes. Or that person may be hard to talk to. Perhaps he or she barely talks or else says things that make no sense.

People with other mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, also experience psychosis. But those with psychotic depression are usually aware that the thoughts they have aren't true. They may be humiliated or ashamed of the thoughts and try to hide them. Doing so makes this type of depression very difficult to diagnose.

Overview and Facts

Psychotic depression affects roughly one out of every four people who are admitted to the hospital for depression. The diagnosis is very important as having one episode of psychotic depression increases the chance of bipolar disorder with recurring episodes of psychotic depression, mania, and even suicide.

Symptoms

In addition to the symptoms of clinical depression, such as feeling hopeless, worthless, and helpless, psychotic depression also has features of psychosis. For instance, a person with psychotic depression may have hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren't really there) or delusions (irrational thoughts and fears).

Common symptoms for patients who are psychotically depressed include:

- Agitation
- Anxiety
- Constipation
- Hypochondria
- Insomnia
- Intellectual impairment
- Physical immobility
- Psychosis

Causes and Risk Factors

There is no single cause of psychotic depression but it has been shown to be more common in families who have experienced psychotic depression. Furthermore, psychotic symptoms can develop after an individual has already had several episodes of depression without

psychosis. However, once psychotic symptoms have appeared, they tend to reappear with each depressive episode.

Tests and Diagnosis

To diagnose psychotic depression, a person should consult a mental health professional who will rely on scientific criteria to check whether he/she has that disorder. The doctor will perform a full examination including a mental health assessment.

Also, lab tests can be ordered to rule out other conditions that can cause similar symptoms.

Treatment

Usually, treatment is given in a hospital setting for psychotic depression. That way, the patient has close follow-up with mental health professionals. Different medications are used to stabilize the person's mood, including combinations of antidepressants and antipsychotic medications.

Antipsychotic medications affect neurotransmitters that allow communication between nerve cells. There are a number of antipsychotic, or neuroleptic, medications commonly used today. Each drug has unique side effects. Usually, though, these medications are better tolerated than earlier antipsychotics.

Treatment is very effective for psychotic depression. People are able to recover, usually within a year. But continual medical follow-up may be necessary. If the medications do not work to end the psychosis and depression, sometimes electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) is used. It's important for the patient to work with the doctor to find the most effective medications with the least side effects. Because psychotic depression is quite serious, the risk of suicide is also great.

Sources and Links

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