

# Catatonia

**Information for people who have catatonia or  
know or care for someone who has catatonia**



**Easy read booklet**

# Who we are and what this booklet tells you about



We are the **Royal College of Psychiatrists**.



We do work to help people with **mental illness, intellectual disabilities** and **developmental disorders**.



**Mental illness** is when you have problems that affect how you think, feel and behave.

**Intellectual disabilities** are problems that affect how you learn new things. Intellectual disabilities might also be called **learning disabilities**.

**Developmental disorders** affect how you grow, learn and behave.



This booklet tells you about **catatonia**. It is for people who have catatonia or know or care for someone who has catatonia.



We tell you more about catatonia on the **next page**.



This booklet tells you information about catatonia. It does not give you advice. If you have any questions, talk to your doctor.

Go to this website to read our **disclaimer**

[www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/mental-illnesses-and-mental-health-problems/catatonia](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/mental-illnesses-and-mental-health-problems/catatonia)

Our **disclaimer** is our official statement about the information in this booklet.

#### Disclaimer

This leaflet provides information, not advice.

The content in this leaflet is provided for general information only. It is not intended to, and does not, amount to advice which you should rely on. It is not in any way an alternative to specific advice.

You must therefore obtain the relevant professional or specialist advice before taking, or refraining from, any action based on the information in this leaflet.

If you have questions about any medical matter, you should consult your doctor or other professional healthcare provider without delay.

If you think you are experiencing any medical condition you should seek immediate medical attention from a doctor or other professional healthcare provider.

Although we make reasonable efforts to compile accurate information in our leaflets and to update the information in our leaflets, we make no representations, warranties or guarantees, whether express or implied, that the content in this leaflet is accurate, complete or up to date.

# About Catatonia



Catatonia can affect how you move, talk and behave.



When catatonia is happening to you, you are awake, but you do not react to other people or what is happening around you.

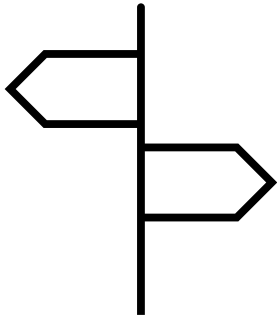
This is called a **catatonic state**.



We tell you about what **causes** catatonia in the **next part** of this booklet.

**Cause** means the reason why something happens.

# What causes catatonia



Some **mental** or **physical** health problems can cause catatonia.



**Mental** means problems that affect your mind.



**Physical** means problems that affect your body.



If you have catatonia, your doctor should try to work out why you have it.



Mental health problems that can cause catatonia include

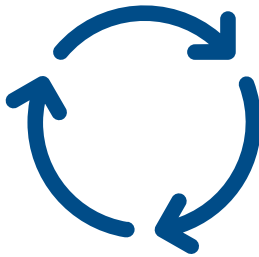
- **schizophrenia.**

**Schizophrenia** is when you see, hear or believe things that are not real.



- **mood disorders**, like bipolar disorder and depression.

**Mood disorders** badly affect your moods and emotions.



- **obsessive compulsive disorder**, called **OCD** for short.

**OCD** is when you do or think something over and over again.



- **post-traumatic stress disorder**, called **PTSD** for short.

**PTSD** happens after something scary or bad happens to you.

- **psychosis.**

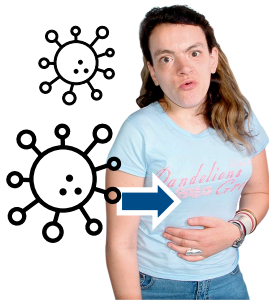
**Psychosis** is when you do not know what is real in the world around you.



- **dissociative disorders.**

**Dissociative disorders** make you feel like you are not part of the world around you.





Physical health problems that can cause catatonia include

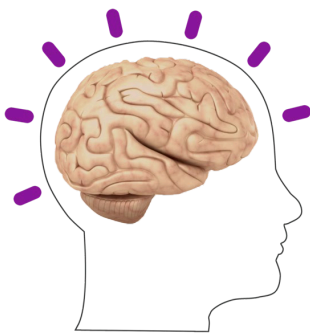
- **infections.**

**Infections** are when germs enter your body and grow and make you ill.

- brain injuries.
- problems with drugs and alcohol.

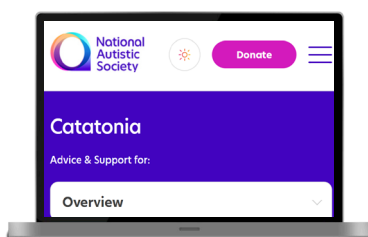


Not everyone who has these mental or physical problems will have catatonia. We do not know why this is.



People with **autism** might also have catatonia.

**Autism** is where your brain works in a different way from other people, and you might need help with some things in life.



Go to this website to find out more about autism and catatonia

[www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/mental-health/catatonia/autistic-adults](http://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/mental-health/catatonia/autistic-adults)

# Symptoms of catatonia



**Symptoms** are the way an illness makes you feel.



We tell you about the symptoms of catatonia **below** and on the **next page**.

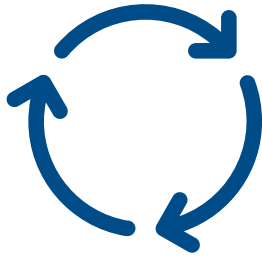


Symptoms of catatonia are

- sitting very still and staring at nothing.
- staying in an uncomfortable position for a long time.
- keeping your arms and legs in a position someone else moves them into.







- **repeating** the same movements for a long time.

**Repeating** means doing something over and over again.



- repeating the same movements as another person. This is called **echopraxia**.



- repeating words or sentences you hear. This is called **echolia**.

- pulling strange faces and staying in that position.

- not speaking, eating or drinking.



- doing what other people tell you to do without thinking about it.

- not doing what other people ask you to do.



- suddenly getting very **agitated**. This is called **excited catatonia**.

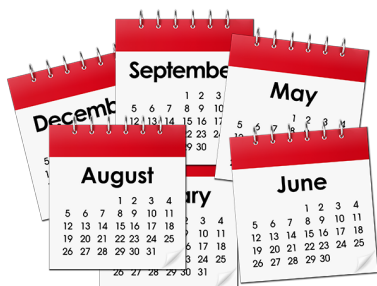
**Agitated** means very nervous and upset.



If you have catatonia, you might not always have symptoms and the symptoms might be worse at different times.



The symptoms of catatonia are different for each person.



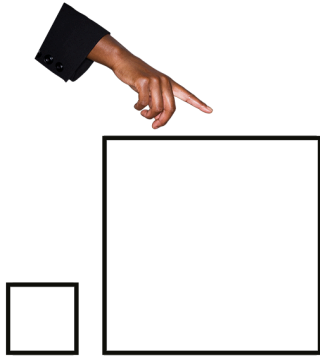
Catatonia might happen to you quickly or it might happen slowly over a longer time.



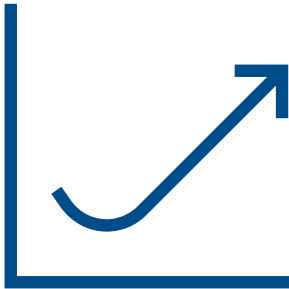
It is important to get help if you notice that you or someone you know has 3 or more of the symptoms in the list. You can

- talk to your doctor.
- talk to your mental health team.
- call NHS 111.

# How common is catatonia

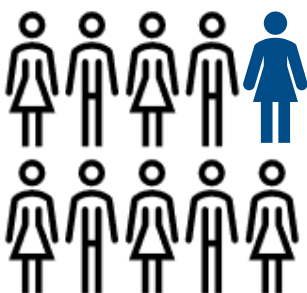


**Common** means happens a lot.



Catatonia is more common in

- adults than children.
- adult women than adult men.
- teenagers than young children.
- teenage boys than teenage girls.



Research says catatonia affects about 1 person in every 10 people who have mental health problems and get treatment in hospital.

# Tests for catatonia



There are a few tests doctors can do to find out if a person has catatonia and what the cause might be.



If your doctor thinks you have catatonia, they might do the tests we tell you about **below** and on the **next page**.

## Find out about your history



Your **history** is all the things that have happened in your life.

Your doctor might ask you or the person who cares for you about your history and about any health problems you have.



## Observation

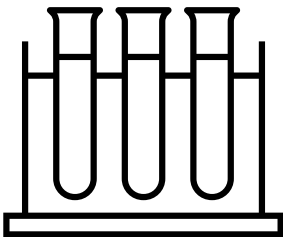
**Observation** means watch carefully.

Your doctor might observe you to learn about your behaviour.



## Examination

Your doctor might give you an examination to check your body is working properly.



## Blood tests

Your doctor might do blood tests to check for health problems.



## Brain scans

A **brain scan** is a test that makes images of the inside of your head.

Your doctor might do a brain scan after they have done an examination and blood tests if they need more information.

# How catatonia is treated



Catatonia can be treated and people who have it can **recover**.

**Recover** means get back to normal.



If catatonia is **diagnosed** early, you might be able to have treatment at home.

**Diagnosed** means doctors make a decision about what illness you have.

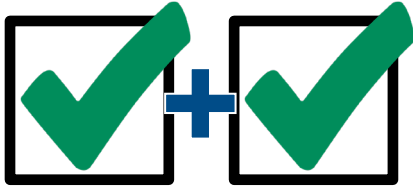


Most of the time, catatonia needs quite a lot of treatment and support. You might get this in hospital.



We tell you about how catatonia is treated on the **next 4 pages**.

## Treating any health problems you have



If you have a mental or physical health problem, treating that problem will sometimes treat catatonia as well



## Lorazepam

Catatonia is often treated with a medicine called **Lorazepam**.



Lorazepam is a **sedative** which means it slows down the body and the brain.



If your doctor thinks you have catatonia, they might give you 1 **dose** of Lorazepam to see if it helps.

A **dose** means each time you take a medicine.





If Lorazepam helps after 1 dose, it can show your doctor you have catatonia.



Some people might need to take a high dose of Lorazepam more than once a day for it to treat catatonia well.



You can take Lorazepam

- as a tablet.
- as an **injection**. An **injection** is when you are given medicine using a special needle.



## Electroconvulsive therapy

**Electroconvulsive therapy**, called **ECT** for short, is a treatment where electricity is sent through your brain which makes a fit happen.



It is sometimes used to help **severe** mental illness.

**Severe** means very bad.



If your catatonia symptoms are severe and Lorazepam has not helped, you might be offered ECT.



ECT is a treatment that works well for catatonia.



Go to this webpage to read an Easy Read summary of our information about ECT

[www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/ect-files/electroconvulsive-therapy-\(ect\)-easy-read---dec-2022.pdf](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/ect-files/electroconvulsive-therapy-(ect)-easy-read---dec-2022.pdf)



## Monitoring nutrition

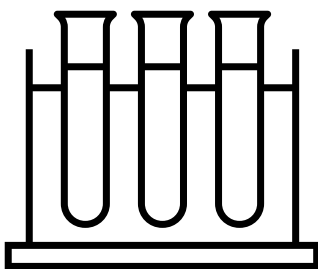
**Monitoring** means watch and check something carefully for an amount of time.



**Nutrition** means the food you eat and how it works in your body.



If you are being treated for catatonia, your nutrition might need to be monitored.



Your doctors or medical team might do blood tests, urine tests or physical health checks to monitor your nutrition.

# What happens if you do not get treatment for catatonia



If you do not get treatment for catatonia, you might get some health problems, like

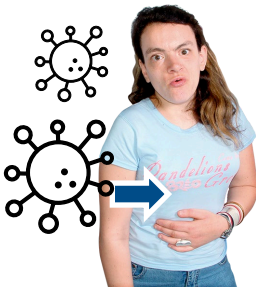
- **dehydration.**

**Dehydration** is when your body does not have enough water to stay healthy.



- **malnutrition.**

**Malnutrition** is when your body does not get the right food to stay healthy.



- infections.

- **pressure ulcers.**

**Pressure ulcers** are sores that can happen if you stay in the same position for too long.



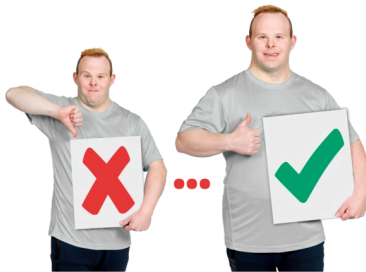
- **blood clots.**

**Blood clots** are when some of your blood gets thicker.



If you do not get treatment for catatonia, these problems might make you very ill and you could die.

# Do people who have catatonia get better

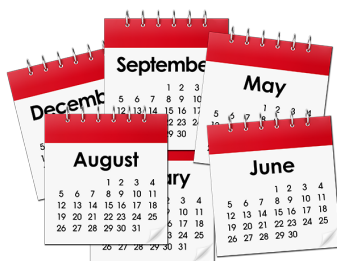


The symptoms of about 8 people in every 10 people who have catatonia **improve** after 1 dose of lorazepam.

**Improve** means make something better than it was before.



How much lorazepam you need to take and for how long is different for each person.



It is not good to take lorazepam for a long time. When you stop taking lorazepam, you should take less and less over time.



If lorazepam improves your catatonia, you still might need other treatments if you have other health problems.

# Ways you can help people who have catatonia



If you think someone you know or care for has catatonia

- talk to their doctor or medical team.
- call NHS 111.



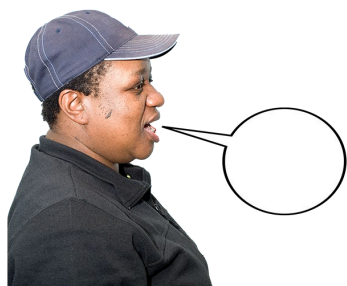
We tell you ways you can help people who have catatonia **below** and on the **next page**.



## Give information

People who have catatonia might find it hard to answer questions and give helpful information about how they feel.

- ✓ **You can help** by answering questions from doctors and medical teams so the person who has catatonia gets the right diagnosis and treatment.







## Explain what is happening

People can find it confusing and frightening when they are in a catatonic state.

- ✓ **You can help** by explaining what is happening.



## Explain what happened

People might not remember what happened to them when they were in a catatonic state.

- ✓ **You can help** by explaining what happened.



## Talk

People in a catatonic state can often hear people around them talking even if they are not talking.

- ✓ **You can help** by being calm and talking to them.



## Take food

People who have catatonia might not eat properly.

- ✓ **You can help** by taking them food you know they like.

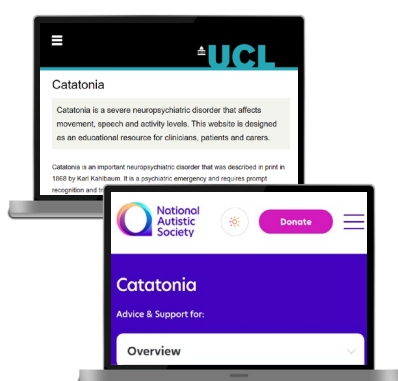


# More information

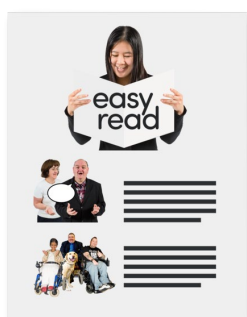


If you have questions or want to find out more information about catatonia, talk to your doctor or medical team.

There is helpful information on these websites

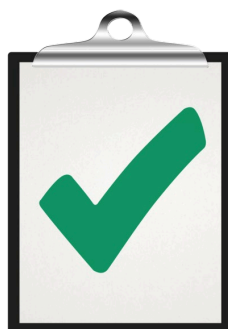


- **University College London**  
[www.ucl.ac.uk/mental-health/research/catatonia](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/mental-health/research/catatonia)
- **National Autistic Society**  
[www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/mental-health/catatonia/autistic-adults](http://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/mental-health/catatonia/autistic-adults)



This booklet is an Easy Read summary. Go to this website to read the full version of this booklet

[www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/mental-illnesses-and-mental-health-problems/catatonia](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/mental-illnesses-and-mental-health-problems/catatonia)



The information in the full version was written in April 2022. It shows the best information there was at that time.

Thank you to A2i for the words [www.a2i.co.uk](http://www.a2i.co.uk) (ref 38009)