Paranoia

Paranoia is a distrust of others that is not based on a real reason for distrust. This may reach delusional levels. This means the paranoid person feels the world is against them when there is no reason to make them feel that way. People with paranoia feel as though people around them are “out to get them”.

SIMILAR MENTAL ILNESSES

- **Depression** is a feeling as though you are down all the time. It is normal in some situations where you have just lost a loved one. It is abnormal if you are having feelings of paranoia with it.
- **Dementia** is a physical problem with the brain in which the brain no longer works properly. There are problems with daily activities of living. Alzheimer's disease is one example of this. Dementia is also caused by old age changes in the brain which come with the death of brain cells and small strokes.
- **Paranoid schizophrenia**. People with paranoid schizophrenia and **persecutory delusional disorder** have delusions in which they feel people around them are plotting against them. Persecutory delusions in paranoid schizophrenia are bizarre, sometimes grandiose, and often accompanied by auditory hallucinations. This means the person is hearing voices that are not there.
- **Delusional disorder** (persecutory type). Delusions experienced by individuals with delusional disorder are more believable than those experienced by paranoid schizophrenics; they are not bizarre, though still unjustified. Individuals with delusional disorder may seem offbeat or quirky rather than mentally ill, and therefore, may never seek treatment.

All of these problems usually do not allow these people to interact socially in an acceptable manner.

CAUSE

The cause of paranoia is often not known. It is common in people with extended abuse of:

- Cocaine.
- Amphetamine.
- Marijuana.
- Alcohol.

Sometimes there is an inherited tendency. It may be associated with stress or changes in brain chemistry.

DIAGNOSIS

When paranoia is present, your caregiver may:

- Refer you to a specialist.
- Do a physical exam.
- Perform other tests on you to make sure there are not other problems causing the paranoia including:
  - Physical problems.
  - Mental problems.
  - Chemical problems (other than drugs).

Testing may be done to determine if there is a psychiatric disability present that can be treated with medicine.

TREATMENT

- Paranoia that is a symptom of a psychiatric problem should be treated by professionals.
- Medicines are available which can help this disorder. Antipsychotic medicine may be prescribed by your caregiver.
- Sometimes psychotherapy may be useful.
- Conditions such as depression or drug abuse are treated individually. If the paranoia is caused by drug abuse, a treatment facility may be helpful. Depression may be helped by antidepressants.

PROGNOSIS

- Paranoid people are difficult to treat because of their belief that everyone is out to get them or harm them.

Because of this mistrust, they often must be talked into entering treatment by a trusted family member or friend. They may not want to take medicine as they may see this as an attempt to poison them.

- Gradual gains in the trust of a therapist or caregiver helps in a successful treatment plan.
- Some people with PPD or persecutory delusional disorder function in society without treatment in limited fashion.

Information courtesy of the NIH.

Document Released: 12/20/2004 Document Re-Released: 09/26/2009
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