

What is ECT?

Dr. Ghaziuddin:

Electroconvulsive therapy is considered a non-pharmacological treatment. It's a procedure whereby a therapeutic seizure is induced in the brain while at the same time minimizing bodily discomfort. The patient receives short-acting anesthesia. They're asleep—they don't experience pain. There's a seizure that we can visually see. It's a very modified seizure, so it might manifest itself just by maybe the flickering of a finger or fluttering of the eyelids. We also record it by an EEG or electroencephalogram.

So it's a process by which we induce a therapeutic, brief, controlled seizure in the brain. And because of that seizure, there are a number of changes that take place over time. It's not one treatment and it's over. It's a course. It may go on. It might be a couple of, a dozen, or a couple of dozen treatments, which is the usual practice in somebody with depression or bipolar illness. However, in some disorders, including catatonia, it may be a much longer treatment, which may go on for months and sometimes even for years.