

## How can medical problems interact with catatonia?

**Jonathan Rogers:**

I think there are two ways in which medical problems can interact with catatonia. The first is that a medical condition, such as autoimmune encephalitis, or syphilis, or HIV infecting the brain, or epilepsy—these conditions can cause catatonia, and about 20 percent of cases of catatonia are caused by an underlying medical condition. It's really important to recognize these because they're very often treatable, and the treatment is different somewhat from primary psychiatric disorders.

So that's the first way in which a medical condition can interact with catatonia as its cause. The second way in which medical conditions can interact with catatonia is as a complication of the catatonia. And because of the immobility and the poor oral intake in catatonia, there's a strong relationship with numerous medical complications, and these range from deep vein thrombosis, where you get a clot in your leg, and that can travel up to the lungs and cause a pulmonary embolus, which is very dangerous.

Patients with catatonia are at high risk of pneumonia because they have a compromised swallow and other forms of sepsis, and they're also at risk of dehydration and malnutrition. Patients with catatonia often end up falling between psychiatric hospitals and general hospitals, as their needs are not fully met by either.