

## What is Catatonia?

**Dr. Ghaziuddin:**

Your question about what catatonia is...it's a cluster of symptoms. We generally see that there are symptoms in three major domains. Firstly, we see motor symptoms: a variety of motor disturbances that might include walking difficulty, writing difficulty, coordination, strange postures, hand movements, repetitive movements. So motor disturbance is the first domain of symptoms.

The second domain is disturbance of speech. The patient may become less communicative—the overall speech may reduce both understanding of speech and expression of speech. The speech may become unusual in the sense that there might be word repetition or phrase repetition. And in some cases, there might be just completely nonsensical speech—what is called a, “word salad.” And in many cases, the patient may altogether become mute. Sometimes that can persist for years. I saw a patient a few years ago who had been mute for, I don't know, 8 or 10 years. Very heartbreaking.

So that's the second domain, speech changes. And the third domain, which is the most interesting domain—and probably also the most challenging domain, because it can complicate diagnostic accuracy—are behavior symptoms or psychiatric symptoms, because they can be so varied and because they can so often overlap with other disorders.

So by these behaviors or psychiatric symptoms in catatonia—the third domain—what I mean is that they may be anxiety. They may be OCD or an obsessive compulsive-type of symptoms where the person thinks or does things over and over again. They might be bizarre thoughts, they might be symptoms that resemble bipolar disorder. So any of these symptoms can occur. They may also be an appearance of—as though the person is experiencing a cognitive decline, almost like an Alzheimer's kind of a picture. You ask them to pull up their pants after using the toilet, and they're looking at you and not knowing what to do.

So they can be a wide range of symptoms. Those are the three main symptoms of catatonia