

Dissociative Identity Disorder

What is dissociative identity disorder?

Dissociative identity disorder (DID) is the presence of 2 or more different identities within 1 person. It used to be called multiple personality disorder. The different identities, called alters or subpersonalities, may have completely different attitudes, thoughts, and ways of speaking. The alters may even differ in allergies, right-or left-handedness, or the need for eyeglasses. For a person who has DID, one identity may be unable to remember events that occurred while other subpersonalities were in control.

How does it occur?

The cause of DID is usually extreme abuse that started in early childhood and continues for many years. DID can also occur because of one horrifying event, such as a vicious rape or witnessing a loved one's murder or suicide.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of DID include:

- being unable to remember large parts of your childhood
- not being able to recall having purchased things that you now own
- having long periods when you feel unreal, as if in a dream, or as if you're really not there
- having memories come back to you all of a sudden, like flashbacks
- hearing voices talking to you sometimes or talking inside your head
- sometimes feeling that there is another person or persons inside you
- meeting people who seem unfamiliar but claim to know you
- finding yourself somewhere without knowing how you got there
- sometimes speaking of yourself as "we" or "us"
- hearing friends and family talk about past events of which you are not aware
- noticing drastic differences in your handwriting from time to time.

People with this disorder may also have problems with depression, eating disorders, substance abuse, or panic attacks. They may try to hurt or kill themselves.

How is it diagnosed?

You may not be aware of the condition. DID may be diagnosed when you seek help for amnesia or time loss. Your healthcare provider or a mental health specialist will ask about your symptoms and any drug or alcohol use. You may have lab tests to rule out medical problems.

How is it treated?

Treatment usually includes psychotherapy and may include hypnosis and medicine. The goal of therapy is to bring your subpersonalities together into one identity.

Through hypnosis or psychotherapy, your therapist may help you to become aware of subpersonalities and to understand their roles and functions in your life. Your therapist helps you to integrate the subpersonalities and to cope with traumatic events in your past. Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) may help you to manage negative

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thoughts about yourself that are associated with these memories. When you can deal with the pain of your past, your subpersonalities can become integrated. Treatment may be painful due to dealing with traumatic memories. It can take a long time.

Medicine helps manage specific symptoms but cannot cure DID.

What can I do to help myself?

- Eat a healthy diet.
- Exercise regularly and get enough sleep.
- Do not drink a lot of caffeine.
- Stay away from drugs and alcohol. They can make this illness worse.
- Keep your appointments with your therapist.
- Learn about DID and what signs and symptoms may mean it is getting worse. If you think you are getting worse, talk with your healthcare provider or therapist about what is happening.

When should I seek help?

Get emergency care if you have serious thoughts of suicide or self harm.

Do not try to overcome this disorder all by yourself. Seek help from your healthcare provider or a mental health professional.

For more information, contact:

The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)
800-950-NAMI
Web site: <http://www.nami.org>

The National Mental Health Association (NMHA)
800-969-NMHA
Web site: <http://www.NMHA.org>

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