

# Depersonalisation

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What is depersonalisation?

People who suffer from anxiety or depression feel mentally 'cut off' from time to time. This feeling can last for hours and is called 'depersonalisation' or 'derealisation.' People can feel as though nothing is quite real, or as though they are at a distance from things in spite of being wide awake.

These feelings can start – and stop – very suddenly and can be very disturbing.

What causes depersonalisation?

- High levels of anxiety or panic...  
Strong emotion can cause depersonalisation. The experience of depersonalisation then makes the feeling of anxiety worse.
- Over-breathing (hyperventilation)...  
Hyperventilation means breathing too fast and is often linked with panic attacks. It can cause unpleasant – but harmless – side-effects such as blurred vision, dizziness, dry mouth, tightness in the chest or tingling sensations in the hands and feet.
- Depression...  
High levels of depression can cause depersonalisation.
- Flashbacks and upsetting memories...  
Strong memories of upsetting events can cause anxiety, tension and depersonalisation. Sometimes people are not even really aware of the memories – they are far more aware of the unpleasant feelings of depersonalisation.
- Infections such as colds, flu and other physical illnesses...
- A side effect of medication...  
Some common medications, including antidepressants, can cause feelings of depersonalisation. However, it is more likely that the depression itself, rather than the medication, is the cause of the problem.  
If you think your medication is causing depersonalisation, you could try keeping a record of your symptoms, especially after a change in your medication. It is very important not to stop taking any medication without talking to your doctor.
- A symptom of epilepsy...  
Depersonalisation can be one of the symptoms of temporal lobe epilepsy. Temporal lobe epilepsy is an example of 'partial epilepsy' - because it causes the kind of fits where the person does not go unconscious.

## Depersonalisation

Continued...

The following questions ask about some of the symptoms of temporal lobe epilepsy. If you answer 'yes' to any of the questions, you should see your doctor, or talk it over with your guide.

Please Note: You cannot use the questions to diagnose whether or not you have epilepsy.

- Have you ever had a fit or become unconscious for no reason?  
 Yes       No
- Do you ever notice strange smells, or a strange taste in your mouth which you can't explain?  
 Yes       No
- Have you ever visited a place which feels completely unfamiliar, even though you know you have been there before?  
 Yes       No
- Have you ever visited a place which seems very familiar, even though you know you have never been there before? (sometimes called déjà vu).  
 Yes       No

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