

Signs and symptoms

Munchausen's syndrome

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Munchausen's syndrome is a serious mental disorder where a person deceives others by appearing to be sick, getting sick on purpose, or causing self-harm. It is also called 'factitious disorder imposed on self'.

People with Munchausen's syndrome know they are causing their symptoms. But they may not understand why they behave this way or see their behaviour as a problem.

Their main intention may be to assume the 'sick role' so that people care for them and they are the centre of attention.

They are not looking for other practical benefits, such as claiming incapacity benefit.

Types of behaviour

People with Munchausen's syndrome can behave in a number of different ways, including:

- claiming to have physical symptoms - for example, chest pain or a stomach ache
- making up medical histories - they may give loved ones, medical professionals or support groups a false medical history to indicate an illness
- actively trying to get ill - such as deliberately infecting a wound by rubbing dirt into it

Some people with Munchausen's syndrome may spend years travelling from hospital to hospital faking a wide range of illnesses. When it's discovered they're lying, they may suddenly leave hospital and move to another area.

Some people with Munchausen's syndrome may undergo painful and sometimes life-threatening surgery, even though they know it's unnecessary.

Symptoms of Munchausen's syndrome

There are 4 main ways people with Munchausen's syndrome fake or induce illnesses.

These include:

- faking symptoms - for example, choosing symptoms that are difficult to disprove, such as having a severe headache or pretending to have a seizure or to pass out
- tampering with test results - for example, heating a thermometer to suggest a fever or adding blood to a urine sample
- causing self-harm - for example, cutting or burning themselves, poisoning themselves with drugs, or eating food contaminated with bacteria
- making existing conditions worse - for example, rubbing poo into wounds to cause an infection, or reopening previously healed wounds

Signs of Munchausen's syndrome

Signs that a person may have Munchausen's syndrome include:

- making frequent visits to hospitals in different areas
- claiming to have a history of complex and serious medical conditions
- having symptoms that do not match with test results
- having symptoms that get worse for no clear reason
- having very good medical knowledge
- being willing to undergo often painful or dangerous tests and procedures
- reporting symptoms that are vague and inconsistent
- telling unbelievable and often very elaborate stories about their past

Factitious disorder by internet

Factitious disorder by internet is a new phenomenon. It is where a person joins an internet support group for people with a serious health condition. They then claim to have the illness themselves.

These actions can have a negative impact on support groups and online communities.

Fabricated or induced illness

A person may also fake or induce illness in another person. When this happens it is called 'fabricated or induced illness by a caregiver'.

[Fabricated or induced illness \(FII\)](#)

Hypochondria and malingering

Munchausen's syndrome is different than hypochondria (health anxiety) or malingering.

[Hypochondria](#) is a psychiatric disorder where a person has a fear of illness. They interpret normal body

functions as signs of major illness.

Malingering is faking illness to gain a material benefit. For example, to avoid work or avoid punishment for a criminal offence.

[Organisations that provide mental health support](#)

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