

Psychosomatic disorders

Psychosomatic means mind (psyche) and body (soma). A psychosomatic disorder is a disease which involves both mind and body.

What are psychosomatic disorders?

Psychosomatic disorders are conditions which cause troublesome, distressing physical symptoms, caused by the autonomic nervous system not functioning correctly. The autonomic nervous system controls involuntary actions within the body - such as your heart rate, blood pressure, digestion as well as other functions. There are many different symptoms and types of conditions which can result from this.

Which diseases are psychosomatic?

To an extent most diseases are psychosomatic - involving both mind and body. There is a mental aspect to every physical disease. How we react to disease and how we cope with disease vary greatly from person to person. There can be physical effects from mental illness. For example, with some mental illnesses you may not eat, or take care of yourself, very well which can cause physical problems.

Some physical diseases are thought to be particularly prone to be made worse by mental factors such as stress and anxiety. For example, these include:

- [Psoriasis.](#)
- [Eczema.](#)
- [Stomach ulcers.](#)
- [High blood pressure.](#)
- [Heart disease.](#)

It is thought that the actual physical part of the illness (the extent of a rash, the level of the blood pressure, etc) can be affected by mental factors. Many people with these and other physical diseases say their mental state can affect how bad their physical disease is at any given time.

Some people also use the term psychosomatic disorder when mental factors cause physical symptoms but where there is no physical disease found. For example, a [chest pain](#) may be caused by stress and no physical disease can be found.

[See the separate leaflet called Somatisation and Somatoform Disorders](#) for more details.

How can the mind affect physical diseases?

It is well known that the mind can cause physical symptoms. For example, when we are afraid or anxious we may develop [symptoms of anxiety](#). These are good examples of psychosomatic symptoms.

How are psychosomatic disorders diagnosed?

These conditions are diagnosed by a doctor. Sometimes you may need to see a specialist to be diagnosed.

You may need medical tests, depending on your symptom or condition. These conditions can be difficult to diagnose and it may take some time for your medical team to make the diagnosis to help you start the right treatment.

What are the treatments for psychosomatic disorders?

Each disease or symptom has its own treatment options. In these conditions it is often important to take into account physical, mental and social factors which may be contributing to a disease. Therefore, treatments such as medication, seeing a therapist, occupational therapist or starting treatments to ease [stress](#), [anxiety](#), [depression](#), may help if they are thought to be contributing to your symptoms.

Can psychosomatic disorders be prevented?

At present, we don't think they can be prevented. Hopefully further research looking at this will help us to understand if this might be possible in the future.

What is the outlook for people with psychosomatic disorder?

These conditions and symptoms can improve or go away completely with the right treatment. It depends on the condition or symptom you have, and relies on finding what treatments work for you. This is where working together with your medical team can make a big difference to your condition.

Further reading

- [Aybek S, Perez DL](#); Diagnosis and management of functional neurological disorder. *BMJ*. 2022 Jan 24;376:o64. doi: 10.1136/bmj.o64.
- [Maggio J, Alluri PR, Paredes-Echeverri S, et al](#); Briquet syndrome revisited: implications for functional neurological disorder. *Brain Commun*. 2020 Sep 23;2(2):fcaa156. doi: 10.1093/braincomms/fcaa156. eCollection 2020.
- [Bennett K, Diamond C, Hoeritzauer I, et al](#); A practical review of functional neurological disorder (FND) for the general physician. *Clin Med (Lond)*. 2021 Jan;21(1):28–36. doi: 10.7861/clinmed.2020-0987.

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Originally Published: 19/11/2023	Next review date: 22/09/2023	Document ID: doc_4664

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