Paranoia involves feelings of persecution and an exaggerated sense of self-importance. A person with paranoid personality disorder typically believes that other people’s intentions are malicious or suspect. Paranoia occurs in many mental disorders and is rare as an isolated mental illness. Since the delusions involve only one area, a person with paranoia can usually work and function in everyday life, however, their lives may be limited and isolated. There are different types of paranoia including conjugal paranoia, erotomania, hypochondriacal paranoia, and different types of paranoid disorders such as paranoid personality and paranoid schizophrenia.

Symptoms of Paranoia:

- A high capacity to annoy or enrage others because of rigid and maladaptive behavior
- Intense and irrational mistrust or suspicion, which can bring on a sense of rage, hatred and betrayal
- Taking offense easily and difficulty with forgiveness
- Defensive attitude in response to imagined criticism
- Preoccupation with hidden motives
- Fear of being deceived or taken advantage of
- Inability to relax, argumentative, abrupt, stubborn, self-righteous, and perfectionistic

What Causes Paranoia?
Researchers don’t specifically know the exact causes of paranoia and paranoid personality disorder. It’s been determined that there is a breakdown of various mental and emotional functions involving reasoning and assigned meanings. The reasons for these breakdowns are varied and uncertain. Some symptoms of paranoia may arise from repressed, denied or projected feelings. Paranoid thoughts and feelings can become part of a delusional system through an accident, a misunderstanding or minor injustice, heightened intimacy, or increased responsibility.

Treatment of Paranoia and Paranoid Personality Disorder
Treatment of paranoia is usually via long-term behavior therapy with a psychotherapist who has experience treating the kind of disorder. Treatment is aimed at reducing sensitivity to criticism and improving social skills. It can be difficult to treat a person with paranoia as they may be irritable, emotionally guarded, hostile, and unwilling; therefore, progress is slow. Therapy attempts to break the cycle of suspicion and isolation by using relaxation and anxiety management and by aiding the person to change certain behaviors. Medications may also be used to address specific symptoms.

Other Resources

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Information compiled from:

Mental Health America, www.mentalhealthamerica.net