



Coma



Overview

This is a deep state of unconsciousness. When a person is in a coma, their brain is alive, but you can't wake them up. They can't move voluntarily, or consciously respond to things around them.

Causes

What causes a coma? It can result from drug or alcohol use. It can be caused by a toxic substance, like carbon monoxide. It can be caused by a severe infection. It can be caused by a serious injury, especially one that involves the head. It can be linked to a brain disorder or a medical problem that affects the brain. It can result from seizures. And, it can happen if a person has diabetes and their blood sugar level gets too high or too low.

Symptoms

What are the symptoms? Generally, a person in a coma looks like they're sleeping. They can't talk or communicate. Their eyes may open and close, and they may make facial expressions. They may also make sounds and some movements. But these aren't things they consciously control. A coma usually lasts no longer than two to four weeks. But sometimes, a coma can last for years. Some people never awaken from a coma.

Treatment

How do we treat a person in a coma? We treat the cause of the coma if it's known. We also take care of their needs while we wait for them to regain consciousness. We watch for bedsores and other infections. We give them nutrition. And we give them physical therapy to keep their muscles active. They may come out of the coma very gradually. And they may need continuing therapy and care.