Alice in Wonderland Syndrome (AIWS)

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Why in News?

AIWS is a fascinating but rare perceptual disorder. It's not dangerous, but it can be unsettling.

- **AIWS –** It is a ***rare neurological condition*** that causes temporary distortions in how a person observes size, distance, body image, and time.
- **Nomenclature –** It is named after the *children's novel*, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.
- **Described in –** It was formally described in 1955 by ***British psychiatrist John Todd,*** who noted patients' surreal perceptual distortions while they remained aware of reality.
- Thus, it is also known as ***Todd's Syndrome.***
- **Symptoms**
  - **Duration** - Episodes are usually brief, lasting from a few minutes to about half an hour.
  - Objects appear larger or smaller than reality (micropsia/macropsia).
  - Distorted sense of distance (things seem closer/farther).
  - Altered body image (hands/head feel shrinking or expanding).
  - Distorted time perception (time feels fast or slow).
- **Causes –** It is ***not a disease in itself*** but a symptom triggered by underlying conditions.
  - **Children -** Most often triggered by ***viral infections*** (***Epstein-Barr virus***, influenza, varicella, Lyme disease).
  - **Adults -** Commonly linked to migraines (sometimes without headache), temporal lobe epilepsy, certain medications (e.g., dextromethorphan), or brain lesions.
  - **Neurological Basis** - Disruptions in the temporo-parietal-occipital junction, which integrates visual, spatial, and sensory information.
- **Risk –** It can occur at any age, but children recovering from viral infections and adults with migraine aura are most at risk.
- **Diagnosis –** There is ***no definitive test***; diagnosis is based on symptom history and ruling out other conditions and supported by MRI/CT scans, EEG and blood tests.
- **Treatment –** There is ***no specific treatment***; it focuses on treating the underlying cause. Infections resolve naturally, migraines need preventive care, epilepsy/lesions require targeted therapy, and reassurance is essential.

Reference

[The Hindu | Alice in Wonderland Syndrome]