

Schizophrenia

Information for patients and families

Read this pamphlet to learn more about:

- causes of schizophrenia
- signs to watch for
- treatments available

What is schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a mental illness that affects about 1 in every 100 people.

People with schizophrenia sometimes do not know the difference between what is real and what is not real.

For example, they may hear “voices” of people who are not real. This may leave them feeling mixed-up, afraid and upset. They sometimes say and do things that appear unusual or do not make sense to others.

Severe types of this illness can cause problems at home, work, school or in a person’s social life.



What causes schizophrenia?

There is no one reason why someone develops schizophrenia, but researchers are studying its causes.

- People believe that abnormal brain chemistry is responsible.
- It may be a partly inherited illness.
- Stress can play a role in making the symptoms worse.

Signs and symptoms

Not everyone with schizophrenia has the same symptoms. Symptoms are usually first seen in teens and young adults.

Delusions

- Delusions are false personal beliefs that can be quite strange to others and are very hard to change.

For example, some people with schizophrenia may believe that others are trying to hurt them, or that he or she is famous or has special powers.

Hallucinations

- Hallucinations are experiences that are not really true. Hallucinations can be experienced as sounds, images, feelings, tastes or smells.

Hearing “voices” is the most common hallucination in schizophrenia. These “voices” may talk to each other, warn of dangers, or even tell the person to do something.

Thinking, speaking or behaving in a disorganized way

- Schizophrenia can make thinking difficult. People with schizophrenia may not be able to concentrate on one thought for very long and may be unable to focus their attention. The way they speak or act may appear strange or disorganized as well.

“Negative Symptoms”

- A person with schizophrenia may not show a lot of emotion. The person may not want to be around others, may have very little to say or may not be interested in doing things. These symptoms are often the hardest part of the illness for families and friends to understand. Sometimes people misunderstand these symptoms as laziness, but they are really one of the most difficult parts of the illness to treat.

What are the treatments?

Medications

Currently, medications are available which often reduce or eliminate the symptoms of schizophrenia. But the symptoms will usually keep coming back without medication and ongoing treatment is needed.

Sometimes the doctor may need to change the treatment plan to manage the illness effectively. For example, the doctor may change the type or dose of medication. Sometimes people can get depressed or even suicidal because of their symptoms.

Other supports that can be helpful

- Family, friends and self-help groups
- Close follow-up with a professional
- Coping and problem-solving skills education
- Family education
- Job training

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