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Contact us to find out more about schizophrenia.

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Schizophrenia

Do you know someone who seems like he or she has “lost touch” with reality? Does this person talk about “hearing voices” no one else can? Does he or she see or feel things no one else can? Does this person believe things that aren’t true?

Sometimes people with these symptoms have schizophrenia, a serious illness. Read this brochure to find out more.

What is schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a serious brain illness. Many people with schizophrenia are disabled by their symptoms.

People with schizophrenia may hear voices other people don’t hear. They may think other people are trying to hurt them. Sometimes they don’t make any sense when they talk. The disorder makes it hard for them to keep a job or take care of themselves.

Who gets schizophrenia?

Anyone can develop schizophrenia. It affects men and women equally in all ethnic groups. Teens can also develop schizophrenia. In rare cases, children have the illness too.

When does it start?

Symptoms of schizophrenia usually start between ages 16 and 30. Men often develop symptoms at a younger age than women. People usually do not get schizophrenia after age 45.

What causes schizophrenia?

Several factors may contribute to schizophrenia, including:

- Genes, because the illness runs in families
- The environment, such as viruses and nutrition problems before birth
- Different brain structure and brain chemistry.

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What are the symptoms of schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia symptoms range from mild to severe. People with schizophrenia may hear voices other people don’t hear. They may think other people are trying to hurt them. Sometimes they don’t make any sense when they talk. The disorder makes it hard for them to keep a job or take care of themselves.

There are three main types of symptoms.

1. Positive symptoms

Positive symptoms include:

- Hallucinations: a person sees, hears, smells, tastes, or feels things that aren’t true.
- Delusions: a person believes things that aren’t true.
- Movement disorders: a person moves the same way over and over. In rare cases, a person stops moving or talking for a while, a condition called “catatonia.”
- Thought disorders: a person’s normal thinking and functioning are sometimes unable to tell what’s real from what is imagined. Positive symptoms include:

- Hallucinations: a person sees, hears, smells, tastes, or feels things no one else can. “Hearing voices” is common for people with schizophrenia.
- Delusions: a person believes things that aren’t true. “Not hearing voices” no one else can. People with schizophrenia may:

2. Negative symptoms

Negative symptoms include:

- Cognitive symptoms: a person has trouble learning it with other people. Sometimes a person will stop talking in the middle of a conversation.
- Motor symptoms: a person shows no facial expression, like a smile or frown. Others take more time. Medications can help, so the type of medication depends on the patient. Sometimes a person needs to try different medications to see which one works best for him or her.


Medication and psychosocial treatments.

There is no cure for schizophrenia. But two main types of treatment can help control symptoms:

- Medications can cause side effects. Most of the time side effects go away after a few days. Side effects include:

- Dizziness
- Fast heartbeat
- Feeling restless
- Drowsiness
- Body movements a person can’t control, like shaking
- Blurry vision
- Menstrual problems
- Skin rashes
- Sensitivity to the sun
- Dizziness
- Muscle movements, especially around the mouth.
- Stiffness in the body.

Many people with schizophrenia are disabled by their symptoms.

Scientists have learned a lot about schizophrenia. They are sometimes unable to tell what’s real from what is imagined. Positive symptoms include:

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Scientists have learned a lot about schizophrenia. They are identifying genes and parts of the brain that may play a role in the illness. Some experts think the illness begins before birth but doesn’t show up until years later. With more study, researchers may be able to predict who will develop schizophrenia.

**What causes schizophrenia?**

Scientists have learned a lot about schizophrenia. They are identifying genes and parts of the brain that may play a role in the illness. Some experts think the illness begins before birth but doesn’t show up until years later. With more study, researchers may be able to predict who will develop schizophrenia.

**What are the symptoms of schizophrenia?**

Schizophrenia symptoms range from mild to severe. There are three main types of symptoms.

1. **Positive symptoms** refer to a distortion of a person’s normal thinking and functioning. They are “psychotic” behaviors. People with these symptoms are sometimes unable to tell what’s real from what is imagined. Positive symptoms include:

   **Hallucinations:** when a person sees, hears, smells, or feels things that no one else can. “Hearing voices” is common for people with schizophrenia. People who hear voices may hear them for a long time before family or friends notice a problem.

   **Delusions:** when a person believes things that are not true. For example, a person may believe that people on the radio and television are talking directly to him or her. Sometimes people believe that they are in danger—that other people are trying to hurt them.

   **Thought disorders:** ways of thinking that are not usual or helpful. People with thought disorders may have trouble organizing their thoughts. Sometimes a person will stop talking in the middle of a thought. And some people make up words that have no meaning.

   **Movement disorders:** may appear as agitated body movements. A person with a movement disorder may repeat certain motions over and over. In the other extreme, a person may stop moving.
or talking for a while, a rare condition called "catatonia."

2. **Negative symptoms** refer to difficulty showing emotions or functioning normally. When a person with schizophrenia has negative symptoms, it may look like depression. People with negative symptoms may:
   - Talk in a dull voice
   - Show no facial expression, like a smile or frown
   - Have trouble having fun
   - Have trouble planning and sticking with an activity, like grocery shopping
   - Talk very little to other people, even when they need to.

3. **Cognitive symptoms** are not easy to see, but they can make it hard for people to have a job or take care of themselves. Cognitive symptoms include:
   - Trouble using information to make decisions
   - Problems using information immediately after learning it
   - Trouble paying attention.

Teens can get schizophrenia, but it may be hard to see at first. This is because the symptoms may look like problems many teenagers have. A teen developing schizophrenia may:
   - Start getting bad grades in school
   - Change friends
   - Have trouble sleeping
   - Be irritable or moody.
How is schizophrenia treated?
There is no cure for schizophrenia. But two main types of treatment can help control symptoms: medication and psychosocial treatments.

1. **Medication.** Several types of antipsychotic medications can help, so the type of medication depends on the patient. Sometimes a person needs to try different medications to see which work best for him or her.

   Medications can cause side effects. Most of the time side effects go away after a few days. Others take more time. **Patients should always tell their doctor about these problems.** Side effects include:
   - Blurry vision
   - Body movements a person can’t control, like shaking
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   Some types of antipsychotics can cause a lot of weight gain and other health concerns, which can lead to diabetes, high cholesterol, or other conditions. Still other types can cause a movement disorder where a person cannot control muscle movements, especially around the mouth.

2. **Psychosocial treatments.** These help people learn to deal with their symptoms and live a normal life. Examples include:
   - Cognitive behavioral therapy
   - Family therapy
   - Support groups
   - Vocational rehabilitation

   These treatments usually go along with medication.
What about drugs and alcohol?

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How can I help someone I know with schizophrenia?

Families are usually the caregivers for people with schizophrenia. Family members can help their loved one get treatment. They can also learn how to help their loved one do his or her best in everyday life.

Caring for and supporting a family member with schizophrenia can be hard. People with the disorder may not want treatment. They may stop taking their medication. If this happens, you may need help from the police or a hospital. Doctors at the emergency room can check your loved one and decide whether he or she needs professional help.

It’s important to respect a person with schizophrenia. But you do not have to allow dangerous behavior. Stay in touch with your loved one’s doctors. Talk to them about how to help your family member through good and bad times.

Check to see if there are any support groups in your area. Talking to others who care for people with schizophrenia may help your whole family.

Are people with schizophrenia violent?

Most people with schizophrenia are not violent. However, a few people have this problem. Violence usually happens at home with family members.

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