

SCHIZOPHRENIA: get the facts

WHAT IS SCHIZOPHRENIA

Schizophrenia is a chronic, severe, and disabling brain disorder that affects about 1 percent of Americans.

People with schizophrenia may hear voices other people don't hear or they may believe that others are reading their minds, controlling their thoughts, or plotting to harm them. These experiences are terrifying and can cause fearfulness, withdrawal or extreme agitation. People with schizophrenia may not make sense when they talk, may sit for hours without moving or talking much, or may seem perfectly fine until they talk about what they are really thinking.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF SCHIZOPHRENIA?

The symptoms of schizophrenia fall into three broad categories:

Positive symptoms are easy-to-spot behaviors not seen in healthy people and usually involve a loss of contact with reality.

- Unusual thoughts or perceptions
- Hallucinations
- Delusions
- Thought disorder
- Movement disorder (clumsiness, uncoordinated, involuntary movements, unusual mannerisms, and facial grimaces)

Negative symptoms refer to reductions in normal emotional and behavioral states.

- A flat affect (immobile facial expression, monotonous voice)
- Lack of pleasure in everyday life
- Diminished ability to initiate and sustain planned activity
- Speaking infrequently

Cognitive symptoms are subtle and often detected only when neuropsychological tests are performed

- Poor "executive functioning" (the ability to absorb and interpret information and make decisions based on that information)
- Inability to sustain attention
- Problems with "working memory" (the ability to keep recently learned information in mind and use it right away)

People with schizophrenia often neglect basic hygiene and need help with everyday activities. Because it is not as obvious that negative symptoms are part of a psychiatric illness, people with schizophrenia are often perceived as lazy and unwilling to better their lives.

WHEN DOES SCHIZOPHRENIA START?

Psychotic symptoms (such as hallucinations and delusions) usually emerge in men in their late teens and early 20s and in women in their mid-20s to early 30s. They seldom occur after age 45 and only rarely before puberty

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND SCHIZOPHRENIA

Some people who abuse drugs show symptoms similar to those of schizophrenia, and people with schizophrenia may be mistaken for people who are high on drugs. People who have schizophrenia abuse alcohol and/or drugs more often than the general population and substance abuse can reduce the effectiveness of treatment for schizophrenia. Stimulants (such as amphetamines or cocaine), PCP, and marijuana may make the symptoms of schizophrenia worse, and substance abuse also makes it more likely that patients will not follow their treatment plan. The most common form of substance abuse in people with schizophrenia is an addiction to nicotine. People with schizophrenia are addicted to nicotine at three times the rate of the general population

TREATMENTS

Because the causes of schizophrenia are still unknown, current treatments focus on eliminating the symptoms of the disease. Antipsychotic medications are used to effectively alleviate the positive symptoms of schizophrenia. While these drugs have greatly improved the lives of many patients, they do not cure schizophrenia. Everyone responds differently to antipsychotic medication. Sometimes several different drugs must be tried before the right one is found.

Psychosocial treatments can help patients who are already stabilized on medications deal with certain aspects of schizophrenia, such as difficulty with communication, motivation, self-care, work and establishing and maintaining relationships with others.

**To Get Help for Schizophrenia Contact
Your Community Mental Health Center:**

**David Lawrence Center
6075 Golden Gate Parkway
Naples, FL 34116
239-455-8500
davidlawrencecenter.org**