

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is treatable with medicines, psychosocial support and lifestyle choices.

Schizophrenia affects the way a person will think and cope with daily life. Someone living with schizophrenia may experience hallucinations, delusions and disorganised thinking. They may lack motivation for daily activities.

The symptoms of hallucinations and delusions should not be confused with experiences of religious faith. Connections felt to religion is not schizophrenia. For example, hallucinations and delusions that are unrealistic or that are harmful to oneself or others are not usual experiences connected to religious faith.

Schizophrenia can be managed. If you or someone close to you experiences these symptoms please see a doctor or seek help via some of the resources below.

There is much stigma and many common myths about schizophrenia. A common myth is that all people with schizophrenia are dangerous. This is not true. People with schizophrenia are seldom dangerous, especially when receiving appropriate treatment and support.

Schizophrenia is not a 'split personality'. People with schizophrenia may have delusions and a distorted sense of reality, but they do not have multiple or split personalities.

People with schizophrenia show a normal range of intelligence ability, and do not have an intellectual disability, although symptoms may interfere with their ability to think during an episode.

Some people with schizophrenia experience only one or a few brief episodes in their lives. For others, it may remain a recurrent or a lifelong health condition.

Causes

The causes of schizophrenia are complex: genetics, early development, substance abuse, stressful social circumstances and trauma (particularly in childhood) can increase a person's risk of experiencing schizophrenia.

Signs and Symptoms:

The onset of schizophrenia may be rapid, with symptoms developing over several weeks, or it may be slow, developing over months or even years.

Psychosis

One of the main symptoms of schizophrenia is psychosis. A person with psychosis finds it hard to tell what is real from what is not. Psychosis is often experienced in short periods of intense symptoms. The main symptoms of psychosis are:

- delusions — false beliefs that can't be changed by evidence
- hallucinations — hearing voices or otherwise sensing or seeing things that aren't real
- disordered thinking — muddled, disrupted thoughts and speech
- disordered behaviour — unusual, inappropriate or extreme actions.

These symptoms are ones that can be confusing to identify when a person has strong religious beliefs and has had previous religious experiences. It is important to seek help from a doctor if you are concerned.

Non-psychotic symptoms

Schizophrenia frequently begins with general, hard-to-pin-down changes to someone's thinking, emotions and behaviour. They tend to come and go, but if left untreated they can get worse over time.

The following non-psychotic symptoms are much stronger signs that something is wrong:

- preoccupation with a subject
- speech or writing that is very fast, muddled, irrational or hard to understand
- talking much less
- loss of concentration, memory and/or attention
- withdrawing from relationships or hobbies
- increased, aggression or suspiciousness
- inactivity and/or hyperactivity
- behaving in a way that is reckless, strange or out of character



- inattention to personal hygiene
- being unable to feel or express happiness

Symptoms can vary and a diagnosis of schizophrenia does not mean someone will have all of these symptoms. The symptoms can vary in length of time you experience them and the severity. If you experience symptoms of schizophrenia, or if you are concerned about any of the feelings or thoughts you are having you should seek help from your doctor.

Diagnosis

Schizophrenia takes time to diagnose. You might get an initial diagnosis of schizophrenia quickly, but it cannot be confirmed until you have experienced a month of psychotic symptoms. For a diagnosis of schizophrenia, symptoms need to be present for at least six months and be severe enough to cause problems at work, school or in your social life. Sometimes diagnosis will change over time and that is normal.

Your doctor can make an initial assessment then refer you to a specialist, usually a psychiatrist, for full diagnosis and treatment. You may have blood tests and brain scans to rule out other health concerns.

Treatment and recovery

Treatments include antipsychotic medication, specialist psychological therapies and community support programs to help you with your physical health, housing, work or school.

About this factsheet:

This information is not medical advice. It is generic and does not take into account your personal circumstances, physical wellbeing, mental status or mental health requirements. Do not use this information to treat or diagnose your own, or another person's medical condition and never ignore medical advice or delay seeking it because of something in this information. Any medical questions should be referred to a qualified healthcare professional. If in doubt, please always seek medical advice.

This factsheet has been adapted from information published by sane.org. The original information can viewed at:

<https://www.sane.org/information-stories/facts-and-guides/schizophrenia>

Taking medications may cause side effects. You can ask your doctor questions about the treatments, medication side effects and what you can expect to feel.

Treatment for schizophrenia can last 2–5 years, or even longer. Many people continue to receive treatment and support to manage their illness across their lifetime. Over time, your treatments may change to reduce the type or intensity of treatments, improve results and reduce side-effects.

Your doctor is a good place to start when seeking mental health help. The factsheet in this series Getting Professional Mental Health Help has more information on seeking professional help.

If you don't feel comfortable talking with your doctor about your mental health, you can look for another one that you are comfortable with. It may take some time to find the right doctor for you.

If you need help now

If you think someone could hurt themselves or others, get urgent help.

Call emergency services

Dial triple zero (000)

Call Lifeline

Dial 13 11 14

Other sources include:

<https://mentalhealth-uk.org/help-and-information/conditions/schizophrenia/diagnosis/>

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/schizophrenia>

This fact sheet has been informed by members of the Embrace Multicultural Mental Health's CALD Mental Health Consumer and Carer group.

Factsheet produced by:

Embrace Multicultural Mental Health

Mental Health Australia

9-11 Napier Close

Deakin, ACT 2600

T +61 2 6285 3100

E multicultural@mhaustralia.org

embracementalhealth.org.au

