

Schizophrenia



Office of
Mental Health

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Schizophrenia

What is schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a chronic yet treatable disorder that affects how a person thinks, feels, and behaves. People with schizophrenia may seem like they have lost touch with reality. They 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.

Schizophrenia symptoms can make it hard for a person to interact with other people, go to school, keep a job, or take care of day-to-day tasks. The symptoms can be very disabling, but with effective treatment many people with schizophrenia experience recovery.

When does schizophrenia start and who gets it?

Schizophrenia occurs in slightly more men than women and affects all ethnic groups. Symptoms usually start between the ages of 16 and 30. In rare cases, children have schizophrenia too.

What are the symptoms of schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia symptoms fall into **three categories**:

Positive, Negative, and Cognitive.

1. **Positive Symptoms** are psychotic experiences that are not generally seen in healthy people. People with these symptoms are sometimes unable to tell what's real from what is imagined. These symptoms can be severe, and at other times, hardly noticeable.

Positive Symptoms include:

- **Hallucinations:** when a person sees, hears, smells, tastes, or feels things that are not real. "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 and others are trying to hurt them.
 - **Thought disorders:** when a person has ways of thinking that are odd or illogical. People with thought disorders may have trouble organizing their thoughts. Sometimes a person will stop talking in the middle of a thought or make up words that have no meaning.
 - **Movement disorders:** when a person has may appear as agitated body movements. A person may repeat certain motions over and over. In the other extreme, a person may stop moving or talking for a while, which is a rare condition called catatonia.
2. **Negative Symptoms** refer to social withdrawal, difficulty showing emotions, or difficulty functioning normally. People with negative symptoms may need help with everyday tasks.

Negative Symptoms include:

- Talking in a dull voice
 - Showing no facial expression, such as a smile or frown
 - Having trouble experiencing happiness
 - Having trouble planning and sticking with an activity, such as grocery shopping
 - Talking very little to other people, even when it is important
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. Often, these symptoms are detected only when specific tests are performed.

Cognitive Symptoms include:

1. Difficulty using information to make decisions
2. Problems using information immediately after learning it
3. Trouble paying attention

What causes schizophrenia?

Many factors may cause schizophrenia, including:

- Genes, because schizophrenia sometimes runs in families. However, it is important to know that just because someone in a family has schizophrenia, it does not mean other members of the family will have it as well.
- The environment, such as exposure to viruses or nutrition problems before birth
- Brain structures and brain chemistry

Scientists have learned a lot about schizophrenia, but more research is needed to help explain its causes.

How is schizophrenia treated?

Two main types of treatment can help with symptoms: **anti-psychotic medications** and **psychosocial treatments**.

1. **Anti-Psychotic Medications** help patients with the psychotic symptoms of schizophrenia. Some people have side effects when they start taking medications, but most side effects go away after a few days.

Side effects include:

- Blurry vision
- Body movements a person can't control, such as shaking
- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Fast heartbeat
- Feeling restless
- Menstrual problems
- Sensitivity to the sun
- Skin rashes
- Stiffness in the body

Some types of anti-psychotic medications can cause a lot of weight gain and other health concerns, which can lead to diabetes, high cholesterol, or other conditions. Other types of anti-psychotic medications can cause side effects related to physical movement where a person cannot control muscle movements, especially around the mouth.

People respond to anti-psychotic medications differently, so it is important to report any of these side effects to a doctor. Sometimes a person needs to try several medications before finding the right one. People should not stop taking a medication without first talking to a doctor. Stopping medication suddenly can be dangerous, and it can make schizophrenia symptoms worse.

2. **Psychosocial Treatments** help patients deal with everyday challenges of schizophrenia. These treatments are often most helpful after patients find a medication that works.

Treatments include:

- **Family Education**
Teaches the whole family how to cope with the illness and help their loved one
- **Illness Management Skills**
Helps the patient learn about schizophrenia and manage it from day-to-day
- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**
Helps the patient identify current problems and how to solve them. A CBT therapist focuses on changing unhelpful patterns of thinking and behavior.
- **Rehabilitation**
Helps with getting a job or going to school and everyday living skills
- **Self-Help Groups**
Provide support from other people with the illness and their families
- **Treatment for Drug and Alcohol Misuse**
Often combined with other treatments for schizophrenia

Are people with schizophrenia violent?

Most people with schizophrenia are not violent; however, the risk of violence is greatest when schizophrenia is untreated. It is important to help a person with schizophrenia symptoms get treatment as quickly as possible. People with schizophrenia are much more likely to harm themselves than others.

What about drugs and alcohol?

It is common for people with schizophrenia to have problems with drugs and alcohol. A treatment program that includes treatment for both illnesses is critical for recovery because drug and alcohol abuse can interfere with treatment for schizophrenia. ***Drug Abuse can increase the risk of suicide, trauma, and homelessness in people with schizophrenia as well as the risk of developing other mental illnesses.***

How can I help someone I know with schizophrenia?

Family and friends can help their loved ones with schizophrenia by helping them get treatment and encouraging them to stay in treatment.

Supporting a loved one with schizophrenia can be hard. Being respectful, supportive, and kind without tolerating dangerous behavior is the best way to help someone with schizophrenia. Check to see if there are any support groups in your area. Talking with others who support people with schizophrenia may help your whole family.

The outlook for people with schizophrenia continues to improve. Treatments that work well are available, and new ones are being developed. Many people with schizophrenia experience recovery and lead independent, satisfying lives.

Finding Help

New York State Mental Health Program Directory

The Mental Health Program Directory provides information on all programs in New York State that are operated, licensed or funded by the State Office of Mental Health (OMH). This site includes three search options: Basic Search, Advanced Search, and Full Directory. Definitions for all programs are available under the Support tab, along with directory help and information on program data collection. Find services close to you at: Find a Program App at omh.ny.gov

Mental Health Treatment Program Locator

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides this online resource for locating mental health treatment facilities and programs. The Mental Health Treatment Locator section of the Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator lists facilities providing mental health services to persons with mental illness. Find a facility in your state at: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

For Immediate Help

If you are in crisis...

Call the toll-free **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The service is available to anyone. All calls are confidential. The TTY number is 1-800-799-4TTY (4889).

If you are thinking about harming yourself or thinking about suicide:

- Tell someone who can help right away
- Call your licensed mental health professional if you are already working with one
- Call your doctor
- Go to the nearest hospital emergency department

Someone I know is in crisis...

If you know someone who might be thinking about hurting himself or herself or someone else, get help quickly.

If a loved one is considering suicide:

- Do not leave him or her alone
- Remove access to firearms or other potential tools for suicide, including medications
- Try to get your loved one to seek immediate help from a doctor or the nearest hospital emergency room, or call 911
- Call National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
TTY number: 1-800-799-4TTY (4889)

The New York State Office of Mental Health thanks the National Institute of Mental Health for providing the information contained in this booklet.

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For questions or complaints regarding mental health services anywhere in New York State please contact:

New York State
Office of Mental Health
Customer Relations
44 Holland Avenue
Albany, NY 12229
(800) 597-8481 (toll-free)

For information about mental health services in your community, contact the New York State Office of Mental Health regional office nearest you:

Western New York Field Office
737 Delaware Avenue, Suite 200
Buffalo, NY 14209
(716) 885-4219

Central New York Field Office
545 Cedar Street, 2nd Floor
Syracuse, NY 13210-2319
(315) 426-3930

Hudson River Field Office
10 Ross Circle, Suite 5N
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601
(845) 454-8229

Long Island Field Office
998 Crooked Hill Road
Building #45-3
West Brentwood, NY 11717-1087
(631) 761-2886

New York City Field Office
330 Fifth Avenue, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10001-3101
(212) 330-1650



Office of
Mental Health

In Crisis?
We've got time to listen.
Text Got5 to 741741

**National Suicide
Prevention Lifeline**
1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Available 24 hours a day,
7 days a week (toll-free).

The service is available to anyone.
All calls are confidential.

The TTY number is:
1-800-799-4TTY (4889)

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