

# SCHIZOPHRENIA

## WHAT IS SCHIZOPHRENIA?

**Schizophrenia** is a mental illness that causes an individual to be unable to tell the difference between fantasy and reality. Schizophrenia can affect different parts of the brain. It is a severe and disabling condition that usually begins in the teenage years or early adulthood, and often lasts in one form or another throughout life. There are five different types of schizophrenia.



## WHAT CAUSES SCHIZOPHRENIA?

The exact cause of schizophrenia is not yet known. Family history, brain function and other health-related factors are thought to be involved:

- **Family History:** having one natural parent with schizophrenia increases your risk of having the disease yourself from 1% to 10%. Having two natural parents with the illness increases your risk to almost 50%.
- **Brain Function:** The symptoms of schizophrenia affect different parts of the brain. Lack of enough oxygen to the brain during its developmental stage, or abnormal amounts of certain chemicals in the brain, are thought to cause schizophrenia.
- **Health-Related Factors:** things that may have happened to your natural mother while she was pregnant with you (malnutrition, case of the flu, etc) are thought to possibly have something to do with the development of schizophrenia.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF SCHIZOPHRENIA?

Their symptoms of schizophrenia will vary depending on the type of schizophrenia you have. In general, symptoms may include the following:

- Psychosis (living in one's own private world, completely out of touch with reality; unable to separate reality from fantasy)
- Hallucinations (seeing, hearing, smelling and/or feeling something that is not there, such as imaginary voices)
- Delusions (believing in things that are not real, such as feeling that others are plotting against you, reading your mind, or controlling your thoughts)
- Bizarre speech and/or thought processes
- Trouble paying attention
- Memory loss
- Lowered judgment
- Trouble planning
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Abnormal movement
- Self neglect
- Slow or very little speech
- Lack of motivation, drive or interest
- Disorganized thinking, speech and behavior
- Racing thoughts that lead to confusion
- Withdrawal from social contact
- Suicidal thinking and behavior

## **WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR SCHIZOPHRENIA?**

The following are thought to be risk factors for schizophrenia:

- Having a family history of schizophrenia is a risk for developing the disease.
- Some studies seem to show that children who exhibit certain behaviors are more likely to develop schizophrenia as adults.

## HOW IS SCHIZOPHRENIA DIAGNOSED?

- Your Health Care Provider will diagnose schizophrenia primarily based on your symptoms.
- Your Health Care Provider will obtain a medical history and perform a complete physical examination (including lab tests) to determine if your symptoms are due to schizophrenia or to another medical condition.

## HOW IS SCHIZOPHRENIA TREATED?

There is no known cure for schizophrenia. How well you manage the illness depends on how well you respond to treatment. Treatment may include:

- **Medication:** Your Health Care Provider will prescribe appropriate medications for you. You may require lifelong drug therapy.
- **Psychotherapy or “Talk Therapy”:** Individual as well as family therapy with a Mental Health Provider is good for people with schizophrenia:
  - Individual therapy focuses on helping you understand your illness and helping you deal with your symptoms.
  - Family therapy is important because family member often take on a lot of responsibility for caring for a relative with schizophrenia.
- **Rehabilitation Counseling:** Rehabilitation training in job and social skills will help you to live successfully in society.

## HOW CAN I PREVENT SCHIZOPHRENIA?

Because schizophrenia tends to run in families, you may not be able to prevent it, but there are some things you can do. Once treatment begins, you will still need to manage on a day-to-day basis. You will need to do the following:

- See your Mental Health Care Provider regularly: Your Provider can monitor your progress, provide support and encouragement, and adjust your medication as needed.
- Take your medications: Finding the best medication for you may take several tries. It may take several weeks for you to start seeing results. Once you feel better, continue to take your medication as prescribed.
- Try to limit or quit smoking: Patients with schizophrenia tend to smoke heavily and tend to choose cigarettes with high nicotine content. Since nicotine may temporarily relieve symptoms associated with schizophrenia, it may be hard for you to quit.
- Drink alcohol in moderation and avoid illegal drugs: Doing this will help your doctor make a clear diagnosis, and help minimize your own symptoms.
- Pay close attention to your diet and try to limit your intake of high calorie drinks: Some of the medication used to treat schizophrenia can increase thirst and/or appetite. Weight gain is a common side effect of most antipsychotic medications. If you find yourself drinking a lot of beverages, try to drink low-calorie beverages- preferably water.

## **REFERENCES / LINKS:**

American Academy of Family Physicians

<http://www.familydoctor.org/handouts/266.html>

National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/schizoph.cfm>

Thomson Micromedex

[http://www.praxis.md/index.asp?page=bhgarticle&section=brief&article\\_id=BHG01PS13&go-bhg.x=12&go-bhg.y=5](http://www.praxis.md/index.asp?page=bhgarticle&section=brief&article_id=BHG01PS13&go-bhg.x=12&go-bhg.y=5)

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR MENTAL HEALTH CARE PROVIDER



- What's the name of my medication and how will it help me?
- What dosage(s) of medication do I need to take?
- At what times of the day should I take them? Do I need to take them with food?
- Do I need to avoid any specific foods, medications, supplements (vitamins, herbs) or activities while I a taking this medication?
- What should I do if I forget to take my medication?
- What side effects might I have? What can I do about them?
- How can I reach you in an emergency?
- How long will it take for me to feel better? What type of improvement should I expect?
- Are there any special risks I should worry about? How can I prevent them? How can I recognize them?
- If my medication needs to be stopped for any reason, how should I do it? (Never stop taking your medication without talking to your Mental Health Provider.)
- Should I have "talk" therapy? What type do you recommend? Is it possible that I could be treated with talk therapy and no medication?
- Is there anything I can do to help my treatment work better, such as changing my diet, physical activity, sleep pattern, or lifestyle?
- If my current treatment isn't helpful, what are my alternatives? What is my next step?
- What risks do I need to consider if I want to become pregnant?
- How can I spot my warning signs?

There are two key people on your health care team, you and your health care provider. You are just as important as your provider in directing your health care. The first step you should take in becoming an active team member of your health care team is to understand what you are being treated for and why. Continue to ask questions until you understand the answer. By paying attention to your health and maintaining your own records, you will become an active, informed decision maker in your health care.



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