

# Schizophrenia



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## WHAT IS SCHIZOPHRENIA?

Schizophrenia is a serious mental illness. Many people with schizophrenia are disabled by their symptoms. Medications and other treatments can help control the symptoms.

People with schizophrenia may hear voices and have other disturbances of the five senses that other people do not have. Also, they may think other people are trying to hurt them. The illness can make it hard for them to keep a job or take care of themselves.

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. Symptoms of schizophrenia usually start between ages 16 and 30. Men often develop symptoms at a younger age than women. Sometimes, the illness runs in families.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

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

1. **Positive Symptoms** refer to the distortion of a person's normal thinking and functioning. People with these symptoms are sometimes unable to tell what is real from what is imagined. Positive symptoms include:

**Hallucinations:** when a person hears, sees, or feels things that no one else can.

**Delusions:** when a person has a false belief and the person will not change this belief even when presented with the facts.

**Thought disorders:** ways of thinking that are not usual or helpful. For some individuals, they may stop talking in the middle of a sentence or

make up words that have no meaning.

**Motor disorders:** a person may have a movement disorder and repeat certain motions over and over. In another extreme, a person may stop moving or talking for a while. This rare condition is 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. Negative symptoms include:
  - Talking in a dull voice
  - No facial expression
  - Trouble having fun
  - Talking very little, 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
  - Trouble paying attention

While schizophrenia is a serious illness, symptoms can be treated with medication and other treatments. Treatments such as family education, illness management skills, rehabilitation and self-help groups can be helpful in the recovery process.

When taking medication to treat schizophrenia, it is important to report side effects to the doctor. One should not stop taking a medication without a doctor's help. Stopping medication can be dangerous and symptoms may worsen. For family members, stay in touch with your loved one's doctors and talk to them about how to help your family member through good and bad times.