

## Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a chronic, severe mental disorder that affects the way a person thinks, acts, expresses emotions, perceives reality, and relates to others. Though schizophrenia isn't as common as other major mental illnesses, it can be the most chronic and disabling. Doctors often describe schizophrenia as a type of psychosis. This means the person may not always be able to distinguish his or her own thoughts and ideas from reality.

People with schizophrenia often have problems doing well in society, at work, at school, and in relationships. They might feel frightened and withdrawn, and could appear to have lost touch with reality. This lifelong disease cannot be cured but can be controlled with proper treatment.

### Symptoms

Schizophrenia involves a range of problems with thinking (cognition), behaviour and emotions. Signs and symptoms may vary, but usually involve delusions, hallucinations or disorganized speech, and reflect an impaired ability to function. Symptoms may include:

- **Delusions.** These are false beliefs that are not based in reality. For example, you think that you're being harmed or harassed; certain gestures or comments are directed at you; you have exceptional ability or fame; another person is in love with you; or a major catastrophe is about to occur. Delusions occur in most people with schizophrenia.
- **Hallucinations.** These usually involve seeing or hearing things that do not exist. Yet for the person with schizophrenia, they have the full force and impact of a normal experience. Hallucinations can be in any of the senses, but hearing voices is the most common hallucination.
- **Disorganized thinking (speech).** Disorganized thinking is inferred from disorganized speech. Effective communication can be impaired, and answers to questions may be partially or completely unrelated. Rarely, speech may include putting together meaningless words that can't be understood, sometimes known as word salad.
- **Extremely disorganized or abnormal motor behaviour.** This may show in a number of ways, from childlike silliness to unpredictable agitation. Behaviour isn't focused on a goal, so it's hard to do tasks. Behaviour can include resistance to instructions, inappropriate or bizarre posture, a complete lack of response, or useless and excessive movement.
- **Negative symptoms.** This refers to reduced or lack of ability to function normally. For example, the person may neglect personal hygiene or appear to lack emotion (does not make eye contact, doesn't change facial expressions or speaks in a monotone). In addition, the person may lose interest in everyday activities, socially withdraw or lack the ability to experience pleasure.

Symptoms can vary in type and severity over time, with periods of worsening and remission of symptoms. Some symptoms may always be present.

In men, schizophrenia symptoms typically start in the early to mid-20s. In women, symptoms typically begin in the late 20s. It's uncommon for children to be diagnosed with schizophrenia and rare for those older than age 45.

Because psychiatric experts disagree about what schizophrenia is, some people argue that this term shouldn't be used at all. Others think the name of the condition doesn't matter, and prefer to just focus on helping you manage your symptoms and meeting your individual needs.

### Resources:

*Your guide to schizophrenia*

Schizophrenia: An Overview

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/schizophrenia/overview/>

Living with Schizophrenia

<https://www.verywellmind.com/coping-with-schizophrenia-2953094>

Self-care for schizophrenia

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/schizophrenia/self-care/>