

SCHIZOPHRENIA



Schizophrenia is a serious mental illness that interferes with a person's ability to think clearly, manage emotions, make decisions and relate to others. It is a complex, long-term medical illness, affecting about 1% of Americans. Although schizophrenia can occur at any age, the average age of onset tends to be in the late teens to the early 20s for men, and the late 20s to early 30s for women. It is uncommon for schizophrenia to be diagnosed in a person younger than 12 or older than 40. It is possible to live well with schizophrenia.

SYMPTOMS

The first signs can include a change of friends, a drop in grades, sleep problems, and irritability. Other factors include isolating oneself and withdrawing from others, an increase in unusual thoughts and suspicions, and a family history of psychosis. In young people who develop schizophrenia, this stage of the disorder is called the "prodromal" period.

With any condition, it's essential to get a comprehensive medical evaluation in order to obtain the best diagnosis. For a diagnosis of schizophrenia, some of the following symptoms are present in the context of reduced functioning for at least 6 months:

- Hallucinations: These include a person hearing voices, seeing things, or smelling things others can't perceive.
- Delusions: These are false beliefs that don't change even when the person who holds them is presented with new ideas or facts.
- Negative symptoms: These diminish a person's abilities.
- Cognitive issues/disorganized thinking.

CAUSES

Research suggests that schizophrenia may have several possible causes including genetics, environment, brain chemistry, and substance use.

TREATMENT

There is no cure for schizophrenia, but it can be treated and managed in several ways:

- Antipsychotic medications
- Psychotherapy, such as cognitive behavioral therapy and assertive community treatment and supportive therapy
- Self-management strategies and education

Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness