

Facts about SCHIZOPHRENIA

What is schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a brain disorder. It is not a personality defect. Persons who suffer from schizophrenia do not have a “split personality.”

Chemical imbalances in the brain, from unknown causes, produce the symptoms of schizophrenia. Scientists can now identify physical differences in the brains of persons who have schizophrenia compared to those who do not.

Schizophrenia affects almost 2.5 million Americans and about 100,000 more are diagnosed with it each year.

Very often, the symptoms of schizophrenia are noticed for the first time during the late adolescent years or young adulthood. It affects slightly more men than women.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of schizophrenia include:

- difficulty making sense out of everyday sights, sounds and feelings
- difficulty telling the difference between oneself and others
- hearing voices or seeing things that don't exist (hallucinations)
- believing ideas that are obviously false (delusions)
- interrupted or confused thinking
- difficulty communicating thoughts and feelings to others
- withdrawal from family, friends and usual activities
- blunted or unusual expression of emotions
- lack of motivation
- slow movement or moving in ritualistic ways

Schizophrenia can disrupt a person's plans and rob him/her of enjoyment and opportunities.

With timely and appropriate treatment, symptoms can be relieved and persons can recover much of what they may have lost to the illness.

Can schizophrenia be treated?

Treatment for schizophrenia includes:

- anti-psychotic medication
- education
- counseling and psychiatric rehabilitation services.

Anti-psychotic medications act to correct the biochemical malfunctioning of the brain, thereby reducing or eliminating symptoms and preventing relapse.

Medications affect different people in different ways. Since no blood tests are currently available to determine what medication would be most beneficial for each individual, some trial and error is necessary to find the right medication or combination of medications.

Counseling and education are important in the treatment of schizophrenia in order to help the individual and family understand and accept the illness and to help them maintain hope and optimism during stressful times.

Psychiatric rehabilitation services are an essential component in recovery from schizophrenia, as individuals learn coping skills, lifestyle modifications, and healthy self-care habits. It also helps the individual set goals for recovery and learn the skills necessary to achieve these goals.

Consumer/self-help and family advocacy groups play an important role in the process of recovering from schizophrenia.

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