

Recognizing the signs of schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a treatable serious mental illness that affects a person's thoughts, feelings, mood and overall functioning. This disorder can cause hallucinations, delusions and unusual behaviors. People with the disorder might also have cognitive challenges, such as problems with memory, attention and concentration.

Risk factors

About one in 100 Americans are diagnosed with schizophrenia. There is a genetic component to schizophrenia, and people who have a parent or sibling with the disease have a slightly increased risk of developing it, though the odds are still that they will not. Scientists don't believe there is a single gene for schizophrenia. More likely, a variety of genes and environmental factors are responsible for the development of the disease. Most people first exhibit symptoms in their teens or 20s. It is less common to develop the disorder in midlife or beyond.

Signs and symptoms

- Hallucinations, such as hearing voices or seeing things that others do not experience.
- Beliefs that are odd or that others do not share.
- Trouble thinking logically.
- Agitated or repetitive body movements.
- Lack of emotional expression when talking.
- Speaking little.
- Lack of pleasure in everyday activities.
- Difficulty paying attention.
- Trouble applying information to make decisions.
- Problems with working memory (a type of short-term memory involved in processing information).

How psychologists can help

It used to be thought that recovery from schizophrenia was rare. However, evidence now suggests that schizophrenia is a treatable illness and recovery is possible. Some individuals have an initial psychotic episode, but do not have symptoms reoccur. For many others, the symptoms of schizophrenia improve naturally as they age. Clinical researchers are also optimistic, as new specialized treatment programs appear to promote better functioning and better outcomes. Treatment for schizophrenia usually involves a variety of strategies to reduce the symptoms of the disease over the long term. Antipsychotic medications are often an important part of treatment. Such medications usually need to be taken daily to be effective.

Psychotherapy may also be a valuable part of treatment. Psychologists can help people with schizophrenia cope with the difficult effects of the disease, including challenges related to self-care, work, school and relationships.

Family interventions in which relatives participate in therapy sessions may be particularly helpful for people with schizophrenia. A 2001 review of studies found that family interventions reduce rates of psychotic relapse or rehospitalization by 20 percent (*Schizophrenia Bulletin*, 2001). A second review drew similar conclusions, and also found evidence that people with

schizophrenia who participate in family therapy were more likely to take their medications as prescribed (*Psychological Medicine*, 2002).

To find a psychologist in your area, use APA's [Psychologist Locator Service](#).

Being diagnosed with schizophrenia may come as a shock, but the disease is treatable and recovery is possible. A psychologist can help you manage the disease in order to live a full and fulfilling life.

Additional Resources

APA: [How to Help in an Emotional Crisis](#).

Facts about [schizophrenia](#) from the National Institute of Mental Health.

Pilling, S., Bebbington, P., Kuipers, E., Garety, P., Geddes, J., Orbach, G. and Morgan, C. (2002).

Psychological treatments in schizophrenia: Meta-analysis of family intervention and cognitive behaviour therapy. *Psychological Medicine* 32, 763-782.

Pitschel-Walz, G., Leucht, S., Bauml, J., Kissling, W., and Engel, R.R. (2001). The effect of family interventions on relapse and rehospitalization in schizophrenia — a meta-analysis. *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 27 (1), 73-92.

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