

Schizophrenia Fact Sheet

Schizophrenia is a chronic, severe and disabling brain disorder that affects approximately 2.4 million U.S. adults.¹ Although schizophrenia is a lifelong condition, people living with the disease can work toward recovery and lead more independent lives with early intervention, medication and comprehensive, integrated care and social support.

- Schizophrenia causes severe symptoms that disrupt a person's normal thoughts, speech and behavior.^{2,3}
- Schizophrenia can interfere with one's ability to think clearly, to separate reality from fantasy, to manage emotions in social situations or to make decisions.⁴
- The specific cause of schizophrenia is unknown, but it is thought to be influenced by a combination of genetic and environmental factors.⁵
- Schizophrenia can affect people of any gender, race, culture, religion or socioeconomic status.⁶
- Symptoms of schizophrenia typically first appear as an episode of psychosis in the late teens to early twenties in men and in the mid-twenties to early thirties in women.^{7,8}

The symptoms of schizophrenia fall into three general categories—positive, negative and cognitive. Not all people with schizophrenia experience the same symptoms.^{9,10}

- Positive symptoms are psychotic behaviors not seen in healthy people, including experiencing delusions, hallucinations, and disorganized thinking.^{11,12,13}
- Negative symptoms are associated with disruptions to normal emotions and behaviors, including emotional flatness or lack of expression, being uninterested or apathetic toward life and an inability to start and follow through with activities.^{14,15,16}
- Cognitive symptoms refer to thought processes and include having difficulty with attention, prioritizing tasks, organizing thoughts and certain types of memory.^{17,18}

Schizophrenia is a chronic condition that can have devastating consequences if left untreated and often requires lifelong treatment.¹⁹

- Schizophrenia ranks among the top 10 causes of disability in developed countries worldwide.²⁰
- Untreated schizophrenia may lead to a higher risk of relapse (the reemergence or worsening of symptoms), more severe relapses and a poorer quality of life.²¹ It can negatively impact self-care, occupational performance, social and familial relationships and participation in broader community life.²²

While there is no cure for the illness, individuals with schizophrenia can live meaningful and more independent lives with a treatment regimen that may include medication, psychotherapy and other interventions.²³

- Currently, there are no medical tests for psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia.²⁴ Diagnoses are made after a thorough interview of the person and family members by a psychiatrist and by physical exam.²⁵
- Typically, a doctor can accurately diagnose schizophrenia in a patient by observing the course of the illness over a six-month period.²⁶
- Medications for serious mental illness have been shown to be a cornerstone of treatment.^{27,28}
- With early treatment, around 80 percent of people will recover after their first episode of psychosis.²⁹ In general, about 75 percent of people with schizophrenia have at least one psychotic relapse within the first five years of diagnosis.³⁰ However, 20 percent will never have another episode.³¹
- People with schizophrenia require an individualized treatment plan and may need to try several medications before finding the one, or combination of medications, that works best for them.^{32,33}
- Treatment is believed to be more effective if it is begun early (shortly after the first psychotic episode) in the course of the illness.³⁴
- Antipsychotic medications are the drugs most commonly used to treat the symptoms of schizophrenia. It is believed that they restore the balance of chemicals in the brain.^{35,36}
- Antipsychotics can be taken by mouth as an oral medication or by injection as a short-acting or long-acting medication.
- Short-acting injectable medications work fast and are often used when medication is needed quickly – like during a crisis episode or hospitalization.
- Long-acting injectable therapies are used in early treatment and maintenance therapy and release antipsychotic medicine slowly and steadily in the body

over the course of weeks. As a result, the medication does not need to be taken every day.

- It is important to have an ongoing conversation with the doctor or a member of the treatment team about medication in order to better understand how medication might benefit the mental health recovery

process. Talking to the doctor or a member of the treatment team can help a person take an active role in his or her recovery team and better understand the risks and benefits of treatment options³⁷

Schizophrenia relapse can be a common occurrence. It is believed that the more relapses a person endures, the more challenging it is to recover from each future relapse.³⁸

- Common contributors to relapse include substance abuse, stressful life events and poor adherence to medication.³⁹
- Recurring relapses may result in decreased functioning, increased risk of suicide and progression of illness.⁴⁰

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