

About Schizophrenia

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), schizophrenia is a chronic, severe and disabling brain disorder that affects more than 2 million adult Americans, or about 1 percent of the adult population.

- Schizophrenia causes severe mental disturbances that disrupt a person's normal thoughts, speech and behavior.
- Schizophrenia can interfere with one's ability to think clearly, to separate reality from fantasy, to manage emotions in social situations or make decisions.
- The specific cause of schizophrenia is unknown, but it is thought to be due to a combination of genetic and environmental factors. In fact, schizophrenia occurs in 10 percent of people with a first-degree relative (a parent, brother or sister) with the disorder.
- Schizophrenia can affect people of any gender, race, culture, religion or socioeconomic status.
- Symptoms of schizophrenia typically emerge in the late teens or early twenties in men, and tend to appear in the mid-twenties to early thirties in women.

The symptoms of schizophrenia fall into three categories—Positive, Negative and Cognitive. Not all people with schizophrenia experience the same symptoms.

- Positive symptoms include experiencing delusions, hallucinations, thought disorder and disordered movement.
- Negative symptoms include emotional flatness or lack of expression, being uninterested or apathetic towards life and an inability to start and follow through with activities.
- Cognitive symptoms relate to the thinking process and include having difficulty with prioritizing tasks, organizing thoughts and certain types of memory.

Schizophrenia is a lifelong disease that can have devastating consequences. Most people with the illness will likely need to take medication and require special medical care for the rest of their lives.

- People with schizophrenia have difficulty holding a job, taking care of themselves and functioning in society. As a result, the burden to assist with finances, adhering to medication and other basic needs can fall on a patient's family and society at large.
 - Each year, the cost of untreated mental illness is more than \$100 billion in the United States.
- If left untreated, the consequences of mental illnesses like schizophrenia can be devastating, and can include disability, unemployment, substance abuse, homelessness, incarceration and suicide.
 - People with schizophrenia attempt suicide more often than those in the general population.

While there is no cure for schizophrenia, it is a treatable and manageable medical condition.

- Currently, there are no medical tests for psychiatric disorders. Diagnoses are made based on a physical exam and thorough psychiatric interview of the person and family members.
- Typically, a doctor can accurately diagnose schizophrenia in a patient by observing the course of the illness over a six-month period.
- Treatments for serious mental illnesses, like schizophrenia, have been shown to be effective; between 70 and 90 percent of patients can reduce their symptoms using a combination of medication and therapy.

- 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.
- Treatment is believed to be most effective if begun early in the course of the illness.

Relapse is a common and devastating occurrence often associated with discontinuation of medication. It is believed that the more relapses a person endures, the more challenging it is to recover from each future relapse.

- More than 80 percent of schizophrenia patients have at least one psychotic relapse within the first five years of diagnosis.
 - In one study, roughly one-third (36.6 percent) of acute care inpatient admissions with schizophrenia occurred during gaps in oral antipsychotic doses.
 - In another study, patients treated with atypical oral antipsychotics missed their medication for about one-third of the year (110 days).
- According to the National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression (NARSAD), the best way for patients to reduce the risk of relapse is to take the prescribed medication as long as their doctors recommend.
 - Reasons for treatment discontinuation may include that patients do not think they are ill, may not remember to take their medication everyday or might stop taking medication if they feel better.
- For those patients who have difficulties taking their medication, treatments available in long-acting forms may help.

