Understanding Schizophrenia

WHAT IS SCHIZOPHRENIA?

Schizophrenia is a serious but treatable brain condition that affects how a person thinks, feels, and perceives the world. It typically begins in late adolescence or early adulthood and requires ongoing, lifelong management, but with the right support, many people lead meaningful, fulfilling lives.

~1%
of people worldwide are affected

24M+
people living with schizophrenia globally

Many people
can see significant improvement with treatment

Top 20
causes of disability worldwide

RECOGNIZING SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of schizophrenia fall into 3 main categories. Recognizing these can help you and your care team manage them more effectively.

Positive Symptoms

- Hallucinations (hearing/seeing things)
- Delusions (strongly held false beliefs)
- Disorganized or confused thinking
- Unusual or unpredictable behavior

Negative Symptoms

- Reduced emotional expression
- Decreased motivation or energy
- Social withdrawal
- Difficulty experiencing pleasure

Cognitive Symptoms

- Trouble with attention and focus
- Difficulty with memory and recall
- Problems with planning/decisions
- Slower processing of information

WHAT CAUSES SCHIZOPHRENIA?

Schizophrenia results from a combination of genetic vulnerability and environmental triggers; it is **not** caused by weakness, bad parenting, or personal failure. Scientists believe that changes in brain signaling, particularly involving **dopamine** and **glutamate**, disrupt communication between brain regions responsible for thinking, perception, and behavior, contributing to symptoms. Stress, substance use, and certain factors during development may also play a role. Research is still ongoing to learn more about the causes of schizophrenia.

Genetic Factors

- Having a parent or sibling with schizophrenia increases risk
- No single gene causes it; many genes interact
- Genetics is not destiny: Most relatives do not develop it

Environmental Factors

- Cannabis or stimulant use, especially in adolescence
- Severe early-life trauma or psychosocial stress

What You Should Know

- Schizophrenia is a medical condition, not a personal failure
- Symptoms can improve, and many people build meaningful lives with treatment
- Taking medication regularly lowers the chance of relapse for many people
- Therapy, family support, peer support, and work supports can all help recovery

Healthy Routines

- Regular sleep supports brain health and emotional stability
- Avoiding alcohol and drugs makes treatment more effective
- Physical activity improves mood and reduces symptoms
- A trusted support person and steady follow-up care make a real difference

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YOUR TREATMENT OPTIONS

Schizophrenia is treatable. A combination of medication and psychosocial therapies gives you the best chance of managing symptoms and living independently. Work closely with your healthcare team to find the right plan for you.

Medications

Help regulate brain signaling involved in symptoms

- Antipsychotics; come in oral tablets or long-acting injectables
- Muscarinic agonists (different treatment option)
- Tip: Never stop medication without asking your healthcare professional; stopping suddenly can cause relapse.

Psychosocial Therapies

Work alongside medication to improve daily life

- Cognitive behavioral therapy
- Supported employment and education
- Family psychoeducation and support
- Social skills training
- Cognitive remediation
- Peer support groups

MANAGING SIDE EFFECTS

Side effects are possible, but vary from person to person. Please consult your healthcare professional if you experience any side effects.

Side Effect	What You Can Do
Weight gain or metabolic changes	Ask about diet plans; blood sugar and cholesterol will be monitored regularly
Sedation or drowsiness	Take medication at bedtime; discuss dose timing with healthcare professional
Movement problems (stiffness, restlessness)	Dose adjustment or medication switch may help; healthcare professional should monitor for this regularly"
Sexual side effects	Talk openly with your healthcare professional; alternatives exist
Dry mouth or constipation	Stay hydrated; diet changes often relieve this

LIVING WELL WITH SCHIZOPHRENIA

Stay Consistent

- Take medication every day
- Keep all appointments
- Track your symptoms
- Use a pill organizer or app

Healthy Habits

- Regular physical activity
- Balanced nutrition
- Consistent sleep schedule
- Avoid alcohol and drugs

Build Your Support Team

- Psychiatrist and therapist
- Trusted family or friends
- Peer support programs
- Case manager or social worker

WHEN TO SEEK HELP IMMEDIATELY

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department if you or someone you know experiences:

- Thoughts of harming yourself or others
- Stopping medication abruptly
- Sudden worsening of symptoms or confusion
- Severe changes in behavior or mood

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988 anytime | Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741 | NAMI Helpline: 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Organization	Website	What They Offer
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)	nami.org	Education, support groups, helpline
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)	samhsa.gov	Free treatment referrals: 1-800-662-4357
Mental Health America	mhanational.org	Screening tools, advocacy, resources
Schizophrenia & Psychosis Action Alliance	sczaction.org	Peer support, education, research
National Institute of Mental Health	nimh.nih.gov	Evidence-based information and clinical trials

References

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This resource is for educational purposes only. Always consult your healthcare professional for personalized medical advice.

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