
Schizophrenia - an overview

About one per cent of the population is affected by schizophrenia at some time in their lives. Schizophrenia is an illness that alters the normal functioning of the brain. During an episode of illness, a person with schizophrenia experiences the world in a profoundly confused way, which is often disturbing and frightening for them. For instance, they may hear voices that others cannot hear.

Confused thinking can also make daily life difficult. There is no cure for schizophrenia, but treatment can reduce or even eliminate the symptoms altogether.

The symptoms of psychosis

Without proper treatment, a person with schizophrenia experiences symptoms of what is called psychosis. These symptoms can include:

- Confused thinking - when everyday thoughts become disjointed.
- Delusions - false beliefs.
- Hallucinations - hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling or tasting something that isn't actually there. A person with schizophrenia often hears disembodied voices that no-one else can hear.

The causes aren't fully understood

The causes of schizophrenia are not fully understood. They are likely to be a combination of hereditary factors and other factors. It seems that some people are born with a tendency to develop this kind of illness.

Certain things - like stress or the use of drugs such as marijuana, LSD or speed - can trigger a first episode of the illness in susceptible people.

The outlook is promising

As the causes of schizophrenia are not fully understood, it is difficult to find a cure or try to prevent the illness. However, schizophrenia is more treatable today than ever before. The earlier a person with schizophrenia sees a doctor or health professional, the better the outcome is generally likely to be.

Type of help available

Treatment can reduce and even eliminate the symptoms of schizophrenia. Treatment can include:

- Medications to help the brain restore its usual chemical balance.
- Community support programs, such as psychosocial rehabilitation, supported accommodation, outreach, mutual support groups, and help to find suitable work, training and education.

Community support and acceptance is important

Treatment should include a combination of medication and community support for the best outcome. This should also include:

- Support and understanding for carers

- Understanding and acceptance by the community.

Where to get help

- See your doctor for information and referral
- SANE Helpline Tel. 1800 18 SANE (7263)

Things to remember

- Schizophrenia interferes with brain functioning and changes the way a person experiences the world.
- Around one per cent of the population will experience schizophrenia at some time in their lives.
- Symptoms of schizophrenia can be reduced or eliminated with the right treatment.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

SANE Australia

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