

Schizophrenia

What is schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia (SKITZ-oh-FREN-ee-uh) is a mental illness. No one knows what causes it, but scientists think that genetics, the environment, and brain chemistry may be part of the cause.

What are the symptoms?

The first symptoms are usually changes in school or job performance, changes in sleep patterns, irritability, and avoiding friends and family. People with schizophrenia may hear, see, smell, or feel things that other people can't. They may believe things that are not true, such as thinking that radio stations are sending secret messages to them. They might insist that these beliefs are true even after someone proves that they are not. They may talk in a way that is hard to understand. They may have trouble expressing their feelings, making decisions, and following through with plans.

Who gets it?

About one out of every 100 people gets the illness during their lifetime. Men, women, and people of all ethnicities can develop symptoms. People who have family members with schizophrenia have a greater chance of getting the disease. Men usually begin having symptoms in their late teens to

early 20s. Women usually start having symptoms in their late 20s to early 30s.

How is it treated?

There is no cure. Medicines can help control the symptoms. Counseling and support groups can help. With proper treatment, many people are able to lead normal lives.

What can I do if I think my family member has schizophrenia?

Call your doctor. People with schizophrenia may not know that they are sick. If you think that your family member may hurt themselves or someone else, call 911 right away.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

National Alliance on Mental Illness
<http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=schizophrenia9>

National Institute of Mental Health
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/schizophrenia/index.shtml>

Schizophrenia Society of Canada
<http://www.schizophrenia.ca>

December 2014

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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