



San Diego's Voice On Mental Illness

Schizophrenia

- **Delusions cause the patient to believe that people are reading their thoughts or plotting against them, that others are secretly monitoring and threatening them, or that they can control other people's minds.**

- **Hallucinations cause people to hear or see things that are not there.**

- **Schizophrenia is not caused by bad parenting or personal weakness.**

- **A person with schizophrenia does not have a "split personality"**

- **Almost all people with schizophrenia are not dangerous or violent towards others when they are receiving treatment.**

Schizophrenia is a devastating brain disorder that affects approximately 2.2 million American adults, or 1.1 percent of the population age 18 and older. Schizophrenia interferes with a person's ability to think clearly, manage emotions, make decisions, and relate to others. The first signs of schizophrenia typically emerge in the teenage years or twenties. Most people with schizophrenia suffer chronically or episodically throughout their lives, and are often stigmatized by lack of public understanding about the disease.

The symptoms of schizophrenia are generally divided into three categories, including positive, disorganized and negative symptoms.

Positive Symptoms, or "psychotic" symptoms, include delusions and hallucinations because the patient has lost touch with reality in certain important ways. "Positive" as used here does not mean "good." Rather, it refers to having overt symptoms that should not be there.

Disorganized Symptoms include confused thinking and speech, and behavior that does not make sense. For example, people with schizophrenia sometimes have trouble communicating in coherent sentences or carrying on conversations with others; move more slowly, repeat rhythmic gestures or make movements such as walking in circles or pacing; and have difficulty making sense of everyday sights, sounds and feelings.

Negative Symptoms include emotional flatness or lack of expression, an inability to start and follow through with activities, speech that is brief and lacks content, and a lack of pleasure or interest in life. "Negative" does not, therefore, refer to a person's attitude, but to a lack of certain characteristics that should be there.

What are the causes of schizophrenia?

Scientists still do not know the specific causes of schizophrenia, but research has shown that the brains of people with schizophrenia are different, as a group, from the brains of people without the illness. Like many other medical illnesses such as cancer or diabetes, schizophrenia seems to be caused by a combination of problems including genetic vulnerability and environmental factors that occur during a person's development.

How is schizophrenia treated?

While there is no cure for schizophrenia, it is a highly treatable and manageable illness.

Hospitalization

People who experience acute symptoms of schizophrenia may require intensive treatment including hospitalization. Hospitalization is necessary to treat severe delusions or hallucinations, serious suicidal thoughts, inability to care for oneself, or severe problems with drugs or alcohol.

Medication.

The primary medications for schizophrenia are called anti-psychotics. Anti-psychotics help relieve the positive symptoms of schizophrenia by helping to correct an imbalance in the chemicals that enable brain cells to communicate with each other. As with drug treatments for other physical illnesses, many patients with severe mental illnesses may need to try several different anti-psychotic medications before they find the one, or the combination of medications, that works best for them.

Conventional antipsychotics were introduced in the 1950's. These include chlorpromazine (*Thorazine*), fluphenazine (*Prolixin*), and others. New "atypical" antipsychotics, such as risperidone (*Risperdal*) and clozapine (*Clozaril*) may be better at relieving the negative symptoms of the illness. Current treatment guidelines recommend using one of the atypical anti-psychotics other than clozapine as a first line treatment for newly diagnosed patients. For people already taking a conventional anti-psychotic medication that is working well, a change to an atypical may not be the best option. People thinking of changing their medication should always consult with their doctor and work together to develop the most safe and effective treatment plan possible.

Psychosocial Rehabilitation

Research shows that people with schizophrenia who attend structured psychosocial rehabilitation programs and continue with their medical treatment manage their illness best.

Open Your Mind



*Mental Illnesses
Are Brain Disorders*

1-800-950-NAMI

NAMI San Diego

NAMI San Diego, a non-profit organization, provides education, support services, and advocacy to improve the quality of life of everyone affected by mental illnesses. It is an affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and NAMI California. Its membership includes persons with brain disorders, their families, friends, mental health professionals and supportive members of the community.

NAMI offers monthly informational meetings, a monthly newsletter, free educational programs, a lending library of books and video-tapes, and support meetings for consumers and families throughout the county.

**For information and
support call**

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