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SCHIZOPHRENIA

What you need
to know

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Are there different types
of Schizophrenia?

Yes there are

- ✚ **Paranoid Schizophrenia:** In this version of the disease, hallucinations and delusions are both frequent and obvious.
- ✚ **Catatonic Schizophrenia:** The person is very withdrawn, pessimistic and isolated, displaying psychomotor disturbances (wringing their hands, uncontrolled tongue movement, repeatedly undressing and dressing, etc.)
- ✚ **Schizo-affective Disorder:** Here the symptoms of both schizophrenia and another mood disorder (depression or bipolar disorder) are displayed.
- ✚ **Disorganised Schizophrenia:** Hallucinations are not present; the person does not speak anything that makes sense, and may display moods or emotions that are inappropriate in the situation.
- ✚ **Undifferentiated Schizophrenia:** The general symptoms of the disease are displayed, but there is nothing that sets it apart as per the above subtypes of the disease.

Why should Schizophrenia be treated ?

Schizophrenia is an extremely serious disease. Not only is it debilitating to the sufferer, but the stress inflicted on the family or loved ones is extreme. Finding the right treatment... and staying on it... is vital, and will enable the sufferer to live and work independently, and build satisfying relationships. Early diagnosis and treatment can prevent the development of additional complications and improve the chance of recovery. If you are concerned that you or a loved one have this disease, make an appointment with your medical practitioner as soon as possible.

What is

Schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is severe mental illness in which people interpret reality abnormally. The word 'schizophrenia' literally means 'split mind'. This refers to the disruption of normal emotions and thinking, rather than the common misconception of people with schizophrenia having a split personality or multiple personalities.

What causes Schizophrenia?

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact cause of this disease. These are the factors believed to play a role:



Family History/Genetics:

People who have immediate family members with schizophrenia have a 10% chance of developing it themselves. This does NOT however mean that all family members will, and do develop it: schizophrenia is INFLUENCED by genetics, NOT DETERMINED by it.



Stress:

High levels of stress may trigger schizophrenia by triggering the body's release of the stress hormone, cortisol.

Other environmental factors:

- Prenatal exposure to viral infections
- Low oxygen levels during birth
- Early parental loss or separation from parents
- Physical and sexual abuse during childhood



Abnormal Brain Structure:

Certain physical brain abnormalities may be present in schizophrenics, including enlarged brain ventricles and abnormally low activity in the frontal lobe.

How is Schizophrenia diagnosed ?

+ **Psychiatric Evaluation:**

A psychiatrist will ask you about your symptoms, psychiatric history and establish whether there is schizophrenia in your family. (The affected person's loved ones may also be included during this evaluation). Other conditions such as substance abuse (alcohol, drugs) are also eliminated. Diagnosis criteria include the presence of certain symptoms, or a combination of certain symptoms.

+ **Physical Examination and Medical History:**

A physical examination will be conducted to eliminate any physical reasons for symptoms that are being experienced (brain tumours, conditions involving the central nervous system). Medical history will be noted.

+ **Laboratory Tests:**

There is no definitive test to determine the presence of schizophrenia. However, tests may be conducted to rule out all other diseases, or to see whether there are brain abnormalities.

When does Schizophrenia develop ?

While this disease can develop at any age, it most commonly develops during the ages of 16 through 30.

What are the symptoms of Schizophrenia ?

Symptoms are divided into three groups:

Positive

Negative

Cognitive



Positive

These symptoms are referred to as 'positive' because only people with schizophrenia display these symptoms; other people don't experience them. Here are a few:

- **Delusions:** Common in 4 out of 5 schizophrenics, these are false beliefs not based on reality. E.g. the person believes they are being harassed when they're not, or someone is in love with them when they're not.
- **Hallucinations:** Seeing or hearing things that don't exist.
- **Thought disorders:** Disorganised thinking or speech. Communication is impaired, and questions or answers may be completely unrelated to what is being discussed.
- **Movement disorders:** Either the person repeats a certain movement over and over, or they become catatonic (don't move or respond).



Negative

These symptoms of schizophrenia may be mistaken for depression or other conditions:

- Lack of pleasure in everyday life
- Unable to start and sustain an activity
- Speak very little, even when forced to interact with others
- Lack of facial expression
- Speaks in a dull monotone
- Neglect basic personal hygiene
- Appear unwilling to help themselves, but this is all a cry to help



Cognitive

These symptoms are only identified when other tests are conducted and may include:

- Inability to understand information and use it to make decisions
- Trouble focusing or paying attention
- Poor 'working' memory, i.e. finding difficulty using information immediately after learning it.

How is Schizophrenia treated ?

Antipsychotic medications have been used since the 1950s. Newer-generation antipsychotics have been known to be even more effective in treating schizophrenia. The doctor would typically prescribe one for his patient, and change or adjust the dosage should side-effects be experienced.

Are there any lifestyle changes I could make, to help or prevent Schizophrenia ?

There is no way to prevent schizophrenia. However, identifying and treating the disease early may help improve the long-term outlook for the sufferer.

References: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/schizophrenia/index.shtml>, <http://schizophrenia.com/>; <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/schizophrenia/schizophrenia-signs-types-and-causes.htm>; <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/schizophrenia/basics/definition/con-20021077>; <http://www.sadag.org/images/brochures/Schizophrenia%20Brochure.pdf>,

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