

# Schizophrenia



## What do you know about schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a complex and chronic mental disorder that affects how a person thinks, feels and behaves. It is categorised as a psychotic disorder because it often involves symptoms that distort an individual's perception of reality. These symptoms can be severely debilitating and can significantly impact a person's ability to function in various areas of their life.

## Key features and symptoms of schizophrenia include:

**Psychosis:** Refers to a set of symptoms characterised by a loss of touch with reality due to a disruption in the way that the brain processes information. When someone experiences a psychotic episode, the person's thoughts and perceptions are disturbed, and the individual may have difficulty understanding what is real and what is not.

**Hallucinations:** These are false perceptions that occur in the absence of any external stimulus. Auditory hallucinations, where the person hears voices, are a common symptom of schizophrenia. These voices can be critical, derogatory or commanding in nature.

**Delusions:** Delusions are false beliefs that persist even in the face of contradictory evidence. Paranoid delusions, where the person believes they are being persecuted or monitored, are particularly common in schizophrenia.

**Disorganised Thinking:** This symptom can manifest as disorganised speech and thought patterns, making it difficult for the person to communicate coherently or logically. Their speech might jump from topic to topic without clear connections.

**Disorganised or Abnormal Motor Behaviour:** This can include a range of unusual behaviours, such as unpredictable and inappropriate emotional responses, agitation, catatonia (lack of movement or response) and odd gestures.

**Negative Symptoms:** These involve a decrease or absence of normal functions, such as reduced emotional expression (flat affect), social withdrawal, lack of motivation (avolition), and decreased ability to experience pleasure (anhedonia).



The exact cause of schizophrenia is not fully understood, but it is believed to result from a combination of genetic, environmental and neurobiological factors. Dopamine dysregulation in the brain is thought to play a role in the development of psychotic symptoms. Additionally, brain structure and function abnormalities, as well as certain prenatal and early life factors, have been implicated in the disorder.

Schizophrenia usually emerges in late adolescence or early adulthood, and its course can vary widely from person to person. It's typically diagnosed based on the presence of specific symptoms over a certain duration and the exclusion of other medical or psychological conditions.

## Complications

Schizophrenia can lead to severe problems in every aspect of life if left untreated.

The following are possible complications of schizophrenia:

- Suicide, suicide attempts, and suicidal thoughts.
- Mental health disorders such as anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).
- Depression.
- Addiction to alcohol or other drugs, including nicotine.
- Inability to work or attend school.
- Homelessness and financial problems.
- Isolation from social life.
- Health and medical problems.
- Aggressive behaviour.



## Rehabilitation and Living with Schizophrenia

Treatment for schizophrenia often involves a combination of approaches:

1. **Antipsychotic Medications:** These drugs help manage the symptoms of schizophrenia by targeting dopamine receptors in the brain. They can be effective in reducing hallucinations, delusions and other psychotic symptoms.
2. **Psychosocial Interventions:** Therapy and support can help individuals learn to cope with their symptoms, improve social and occupational functioning, and enhance their overall quality of life. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), family therapy and vocational rehabilitation are some common approaches.
3. **Supportive Services:** Community-based programmes, housing assistance and social support networks are important for helping individuals with schizophrenia maintain stability and manage their condition.

It is worth noting that while schizophrenia is a serious and chronic disorder, many individuals with the condition can lead meaningful and fulfilling lives with appropriate treatment and support. Early intervention and ongoing management are crucial in improving outcomes for people living with schizophrenia.