

UNDERSTANDING **SCHIZOPHRENIA**

WHAT IS SCHIZOPHRENIA?



The subject in this photo is a model for illustrative purposes only.

Schizophrenia is a serious mental disorder in which people interpret reality abnormally—resulting in a combination of hallucinations, delusions, and exaggerated or irrational thinking and behavior. Less than one percent of people in the United States suffer from this illness.

When people first experience symptoms and episodes, they are often in denial that they are sick. They may be unaware that they're showing signs of schizophrenic behavior. Schizophrenia can be disruptive in many ways, making it difficult to socialize, maintain a regular schedule, work, and keep relationships.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of schizophrenia can change in type and severity over time and involve a combination of:

Delusions:

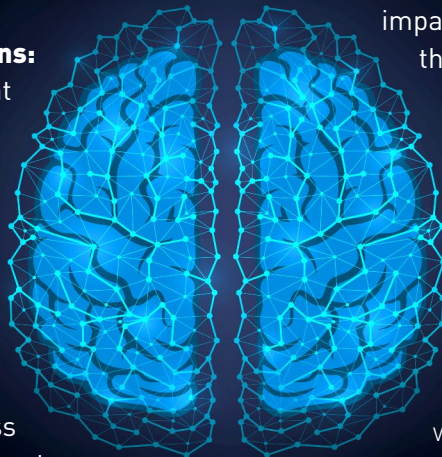
false beliefs that are not based in reality

Hallucinations:

seeing or hearing things that don't exist

Extremely disorganized or abnormal physical behavior:

resistance to instructions, inappropriate or bizarre posture, a complete lack of response, childlike silliness, unpredictable agitation, or useless and excessive movement



Disorganized thinking and speech:

impaired communication, such as answers that may be partially or completely unrelated to questions or a conversation

Negative symptoms:

reduced or lack of ability to function normally, such as not paying attention to personal hygiene

Suicidal thoughts and behavior

are common among people with schizophrenia.

TREATMENT

Medication and therapy can help manage schizophrenia. The sooner treatment begins, the higher likelihood there is for improvement and recovery. However, people with schizophrenia require lifelong treatment, even when symptoms are less severe.

MEDICATION:

Antipsychotic medications help get symptoms under control. It may be necessary for a psychiatrist to try different medications at different doses to find the right combination. It can take several weeks to notice an improvement in symptoms.

If experiencing periods of crisis, hospitalization may be needed to ensure safety, proper nutrition, adequate sleep, and basic hygiene.

For people who do not respond to medication, electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) may be an option. ECT is a brain stimulation technique in which small electric currents are passed through the brain to quickly ease the symptoms of schizophrenia.



PSYCHOSOCIAL THERAPY AND TRAINING:

In addition to medication, therapy and support are important:



Individual therapy helps normalize thought patterns.



Social skills training improves communication and social interactions.



Family therapy provides support and education to families dealing with schizophrenia.



Vocational rehabilitation and supported employment help people find and keep jobs.

NEED HELP OR MORE INFORMATION?

If you or someone you know has schizophrenia, these resources can help. Visit **SAMHSA's Early Serious Mental Treatment Locator** and **Behavioral Health Treatment Locator** at **SAMHSA.gov**. Or, call **SAMHSA's National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD)**.

Learn more at [SAMHSA.gov/Serious-Mental-Illness](https://www.samhsa.gov/Serious-Mental-Illness)