

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a severe chronic mental illness that affects over 21 million people worldwide. It is characterized by hallucinations, delusions, and disorganized speech and behavior. People who have schizophrenia can appear hostile and aggressive, but most are not aggressive and impose a more danger to themselves than anyone else.

Signs & Symptoms

The first signs of schizophrenia often appear as confusing and shocking changes in behavior. Symptoms cause major functioning problems for an individual in multiple areas of their life. The symptoms of schizophrenia are classified as positive, negative, and cognitive.

- **Positive symptoms-** psychotic behaviors such as hallucinations, delusions, and thought and movement disorders.
- **Negative symptoms** - disruption to emotions and behaviors such as the flat affect (no facial expression and monotone), speaking less, and less enjoyment in everyday activities.
- **Cognitive symptoms** - can change memory and ways of thinking, poor executive functioning, and trouble focusing.

Causes & Risk Factors

Risk factors and causes for schizophrenia include genetics, brain chemistry and structure, and the environment. This disease commonly runs in families, with a 10% chance for contracting the disease if a first degree relative has it and a 40-65% chance if an identical twin has it. People who have a second degree relative with schizophrenia are more likely to develop the disease as well. The brains of schizophrenics can also look slightly different than those of healthy people and some areas of their brains may have more or less activity. Scientists have also found that the ventricles (fluid-filled cavities at the center of the brain) are larger in some people with schizophrenia.

Diagnosis & Treatment

For a diagnosis to be made, acute symptoms must be present for one month and continuous signs must be present for at least six months. Treatment plans are focused on eliminating symptoms of the disease. Plans can include a combination of antipsychotic medication, psychosocial therapy, and coordinated specialty care (CSC) which integrates family involvement and case management.

Source – Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/conditions/schizophrenia> and National Institute of Mental Health: https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/schizophrenia/index.shtml#part_145430