Schizophrenia

What is Schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is an illness, a medical condition. It affects the normal functioning of the brain, interfering with a person's ability to think, feel and act. Some do recover completely, and, with time, most find that their symptoms improve. However, for many, it is a prolonged illness which can involve years of distressing symptoms and disability.

People affected by schizophrenia have one 'personality,' just like everyone else. It is a myth and totally untrue that those affected have a so-called 'split personality'.

What are the symptoms?

If not receiving treatment, people with schizophrenia experience persistent symptoms of what is called psychosis. These include:

⊙ *Confused thinking*
When acutely ill, people with psychotic symptoms experience disordered thinking. The everyday thoughts that let us live our daily lives become confused and don't join up properly.

⊙ *Delusions*
A delusion is a false belief held by a person which is not held by others of the same cultural background.

⊙ *Hallucinations*
The person sees, hears, feels, smells or tastes something that is not actually there. The hallucination is often of disembodied voices which no one else can hear.

Other associated symptoms are low motivation and changed feelings.

What causes Schizophrenia?

The causes of schizophrenia are not fully understood. They are likely to be a combination of hereditary and other factors. It is probable that some people are born with a predisposition to develop this kind of illness, and that certain things — for example, stress or use of drugs such as marijuana, LSD or speed — can trigger their first episode.

How many people develop Schizophrenia?

About one in a hundred people will develop schizophrenia at some time in their lives. Most of these will be first affected in their late teens and early twenties.

How is Schizophrenia treated?

Treatment can do much to reduce and even eliminate the symptoms. Treatment should generally include a combination of medication and community support. Both are usually essential for the best outcome.

⊙ *Medication*
Certain medications assist the brain to restore its usual chemical balance. This then helps reduce or get rid of some of the symptoms.

⊙ *Community support programs*
This support should include information; accommodation; help with finding suitable work; training and education; psychosocial rehabilitation and mutual support groups. Understanding and acceptance by the community is also very important.

How do I find out more?

It is important to ask your doctor about any concerns you have. SANE Australia also produces a range of easy-to-read publications and multimedia resources on mental illness. For more information about this topic see:

⊙ *SANE Guide to Schizophrenia and other Psychotic Illness*
Explains what it means to have a psychotic illness such as schizophrenia, examining effective treatments and what family and friends can do to help.

⊙ *Schizophrenia DVD Kit* (Includes a 37 minute DVD and the *SANE Guide to Schizophrenia and other Psychotic Illness*)
People who've experienced illness and their carers talk about the things which have helped them cope better. See above for details on the SANE Guide included.

⊙ *Voices: The Auditory Hallucinations Project*
An Audio CD that explains how it feels to hear voices and what can be done to help.

⊙ *Tell Me I'm Here* by Anne Deveson
Writer, journalist and filmmaker tells the moving and courageous story of what happened to her family when her son Jonathan developed schizophrenia.

⊙ *Recovered, Not Cured* by Richard McLean (audio CD)
A graphic journey exploring the author's experience of schizophrenia: the first signs, reactions from friends and family, how he sought help and the challenges of recovery.

⊙ *Flying with Paper Wings* by Sandy Jeffs
Flying with Paper Wings is the story of one woman's struggle to survive against an invisible illness, and her continued fight for an identity, self-esteem and a future.

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Mobile site developed specially for iPhones and similar devices.

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