

This pamphlet will give you basic information about schizophrenia.

## What is schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a complex mental illness. The brains of people with schizophrenia do not work in the usual way. Instead, messages coming into the brain get routed along the wrong pathways, get jammed or end up in the wrong place.

People with schizophrenia show a range of symptoms with varying degrees of intensity. In the early stages a person may be moody and withdrawn, lose interest in grooming and feel listless.

A person with schizophrenia may not know his/her behaviours are unusual. They may not believe they are ill. However, some people recognize how sick they are and are very fearful. They may be trying to understand what is going on, or trying to cover up that something is wrong.

*The search for a cure for schizophrenia continues with hope for success increasing every day.*

## What are the signs and symptoms of schizophrenia?

People with schizophrenia may have many of the following:

- disordered thinking - thoughts come in small pieces that do not connect. They may appear to be making little sense.
- delusions - false beliefs e.g. may falsely believe that someone is out to harm them.
- hallucinations - hears, sees, feels, smells or tastes something that does not exist
- shows feelings that do not seem to fit with what is happening, e.g. - laugh or show no emotion at all when something is sad
- display unusual behaviours
- withdraw from others because they feel safer or calmer alone or because they are absorbed in their own thoughts
- attach incorrect meaning to the words or actions of others, e.g. may feel that people on the bus are staring at them
- feelings of hopelessness, depression
- lack of energy or interest in life - often confused with laziness

People with schizophrenia may exhibit some of these symptoms some of the time. Others may have symptoms that remain over a long period of time. The illness does not present the same in all people who have it.

## What causes schizophrenia?

There is no known single cause of schizophrenia. The latest research suggests it involves an imbalance in the chemistry of the brain. There may also be a family link (heredity).

## How is schizophrenia treated?

The treatment for schizophrenia includes:

- medications
- supportive counseling
- teaching about the illness
- hospital stays when needed
- rehabilitation - learning how to live with the illness
- community support

## Medication

There are a number of medications that have been found to help bring the chemical imbalances in many people with schizophrenia back to normal.

These medications can help a great deal in lessening hallucinations and delusions, and in helping maintain clearer thought. Side effects may lead people to stop taking their medications. **Do not** stop taking medications without talking to your doctor. There are medications that lessen these side effects. There are also newer medications and medications being developed that cause less side effects.

## What can someone with schizophrenia do?

- if you believe you have schizophrenia, talk to your doctor about it
- it is **very important** to take the medicine(s) as ordered and see your doctor if you have side effects that bother you
- do not stop your medicine without talking to your doctor first
- learn as much as you can about schizophrenia
- **activity** - have something to do every day
- **get support** - find the people in your life who will support you, and ask them for help

## Where can you get more information? Call or visit:

- The staff in the Mental Health Program.
- Canadian Mental Health Association.  
Phone: (780)414-6300.
- Alberta Mental Health Association.  
Phone: (780)427-4444.

## If someone you care about has schizophrenia . . .

There is a need for the sharing of information between the professional caregiver and the family of the ill person, to keep the family informed and to teach them how to live with a person with schizophrenia.

Many families find it helpful to attend a support group. There is a Schizophrenia Society of Alberta that is a good resource for people. The number is (780)452-4661. Some suggestions for coping:

- find out what resources are available in your community
- listen - offer support
- do not criticize the behaviours
- do not support the behaviours - try to stay neutral about them
- support the person to do as much for themselves as they can
- do not take his or her illness personally

It is important to take care of yourself. Caring for and about someone with schizophrenia is difficult. You will need support too.

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# Schizophrenia

## Basic Information

## Information for Patients and Families

**Mental Health Programs  
Grey Nuns Community  
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