



Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a serious and complex mental disorder that changes how a person thinks, feels and behaves. It also changes how they perceive the world, themselves and other people. About 1% of the population of most countries has schizophrenia although symptoms may differ from culture to culture.

Symptoms vary widely between people with schizophrenia. They may be mild or severe. Some people experience one episode of the illness and having received treatment do not relapse. Others have more frequent episodes but remain well for a lot of the time. Still others remain unwell and require a high level of ongoing support and treatment.

Medication is usually a central part of the treatment. This can be very effective although side effects can be problematic. Counselling, social support, and assistance with employment, accommodation, finances and education are also important in assisting a person and their family to cope with the illness.

Symptoms of Schizophrenia

Delusions

These are false personal beliefs that are not subject to reason or contradictory evidence and are not explained by a person's usual cultural concepts (US National Institute of Mental Health).

Hallucinations

These refer to a person's perception of something that does not really exist in their environment. The most common form of hallucination is auditory, e.g. when a person 'hears' voices.

Disordered thinking

A person may think very quickly or in bizarre or confused ways, making it difficult for others to follow their train of thought.

Flat or inappropriate affect

'Affect' means feelings or emotions, so a person is often unresponsive, or finds it difficult to feel appropriate emotions at an appropriate time.

Cognitive impairment

A person has difficulty with mental processes like memory or concentration.

Withdrawal

A person does not want to interact with others and spends a lot of time alone.

Loss of motivation

A person loses their 'drive' to do things, including basic self-care.

What Causes Schizophrenia?

The causes of schizophrenia are not yet clearly understood although a combination of factors is seen as the most likely. These include:

- genetics
- a biochemical imbalance in the brain
- environmental stressors
- drug use.

What Help Is Available?

Schizophrenia can be a very debilitating condition and it is important to realise you don't have to deal with it on your own. Today there are many more services and resources to help people understand the illness and help them on the road to recovery.

Medication

Antipsychotic medication is usually prescribed for those with schizophrenia. This medication can help to control the symptoms, particularly the delusions or hallucinations that a person may experience. There are two main kinds of medication that are commonly prescribed. They are known as the 'typicals' and the 'atypicals.' The 'typicals' refer to the medications that have been widely used over many years, while the 'atypicals' refer to the newer drugs. Although the newer drugs often produce fewer side effects some people respond better to the older medications.

'Atypical' antipsychotic medications	'Typical' antipsychotic medications
Clozapine (Clozaril, Clopine)	Chlorpromazine (Largactil)
Olanzapine (Zyprexa)	Haloperidol (Haldol)
Risperidone (Risperdal)	Thioridazine hydrochloride (Melleril)

Each person is different and medication options need to be explored with a psychiatrist on an individual basis.

Rehabilitation services can assist the person to find and maintain accommodation, education, social skills, contacts and employment.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can be useful in helping someone learn ways of managing their schizophrenia. Supportive or insight-oriented counselling may also be beneficial.

Hospitalisation may be necessary at times if the person becomes unwell or their medication needs to be changed or stabilised.

Support groups offer people with schizophrenia and their families the opportunity to meet those in a similar situation, share experiences, find support, education and reassurance.

Learning about the illness is useful in helping to understand the illness and reduce stigma.

How Relatives and Friends Can Help

- learn more about the illness by joining an organisation like the Schizophrenia Fellowship
- share your experiences of caring with the professionals treating your relative
- encourage your relative to comply with medication
- have important phone numbers ready in case you need them, e.g. the crisis team or other friends who can help
- discuss the person's early warning signs and decide what to do if they seem to be deteriorating
- draw up an 'action plan' with the person when they are well
- be realistic about what your relative may be able to achieve and praise small steps towards progress
- take time off from your caring role when you can.

Useful websites

- The Schizophrenia Fellowship of NSW www.sfnsw.org.au
- US National Institute for Mental Health
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/schizoph.cfm>
- SANE www.sane.org/
- Royal College of Psychiatrists www.rcpsych.ac.uk
- Mental Health Care, Institute of Psychiatry, London
www.mentalhealthcare.org.uk

Talk to Someone

Remember that many people learn to manage their schizophrenia well. Don't let misconceptions about mental illness stop you from seeking help.

- Contact the Mental Health Information Service on 1300 794 991 for information about services in your area.
- Maintain regular contact with your local doctor (GP) as they will play an important role in monitoring your general health
- Ask your GP for referral to a psychiatrist
- Contact your local Community Mental Health Centre under 'Community Health' in the Business and Government White Pages).
- Contact the Schizophrenia Fellowship of NSW on (02) 9879 2600
www.sfnsw.org.au
- Contact the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill (ARAFMI) (02) 9332 0700 or 1800 655 198 (rural NSW) www.arafmi.org



**Telephone Interpreter
Service 131 450**

If English is not your first language please call the Mental Health Information Service through the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS). This service is free to non-English speaking Australian citizens or permanent residents. TIS have access to interpreters speaking more than 120 languages and dialects.



Medicare Rebates and Accessing Private Practitioners

What is the difference between psychiatrists and psychologists?

Psychiatrists are medically trained doctors who specialise in the treatment of mental illness. Like GPs they can prescribe, administer and monitor medication. Psychiatrists do not advertise so it is up to your GP to refer you to someone appropriate.

Psychologists are trained in human behaviour and use a range of therapies to treat patients. They provide services including assessment, psychological testing, and various types of psychotherapy and counselling.

Medicare rebate for psychologists

A Medicare rebate is now available for a number of sessions per calendar year with a registered psychologist* with a Medicare Provider Number. To obtain the rebate you must be referred by an appropriate medical practitioner, i.e. a GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician. The practitioner will ensure that you meet the eligibility requirements and develop a management plan for your condition.

The cost and rebate from Medicare can vary depending on the consultation length and fee charged. If the psychologist bulk bills there will be no extra cost.

For further information about the rebate or to locate a psychologist in your area contact the Australian Psychological Society on 1800 333 497 www.psychology.org.au.

* Similar Medicare rebates also exist for mental health accredited social workers and occupational therapists.

Mental Health Resource Centre

The Resource Centre contains material that promotes a better understanding of mental health issues. New books and DVDs are purchased on a regular basis and visitors are welcome to come in and browse.

Members of MHA, CAG and ARAFMI may check-out resources on loan. The length of the loan is 3 weeks. Membership costs between \$10 - \$30 per individual per annum. Please note that most of the reference books are not available for loan

You will find the Resource Centre Booklist on our website: www.mentalhealth.asn.au for further information contact 1300 794 991.

Disclaimer

This information is for educational purposes. As neither brochures nor websites can diagnose people it is always important to obtain professional advice and/or help when needed. The listed websites provide additional information, but should not be taken as an endorsement or recommendation.

This information may be reproduced with an acknowledgement to the Mental Health Association NSW. This and other fact sheets are available for download from www.mentalhealth.asn.au. The Association encourages feedback and welcomes comments about the information provided. This Fact Sheet was last updated in July 2010.



mental health
information service

Mental Health Information Service
Mental Health Association NSW Inc
Level 5, 80 William Street
East Sydney NSW 2011

Phone: 1300 794 991
Fax: (02) 9339 6066
Email: info@mentalhealth.asn.au
Web: www.mentalhealth.asn.au