

SCHIZOPHRENIA

Schizophrenia is a serious and challenging mental illness that affects more than two million Americans today. Although it is often feared and misunderstood, schizophrenia is a treatable medical condition.

Schizophrenia is a mental illness that interferes with a person's ability to think clearly, manage emotions, make decisions and relate to others. Most people living with schizophrenia have hallucinations and delusions, meaning they hear or, less commonly, see things that aren't there and believe things that are not real.

Organizing one's thinking, performing complex memory tasks, and keeping several ideas in mind at one time may be difficult for people who live with the illness.

Symptoms:

Symptoms often vary from person to person and episodes can range from extremely severe to very mild. Some characteristic symptoms of schizophrenia include:

- » Sudden personality change
- » Hallucinations
- » Delusions
- » Loss of motivation and disorganized thinking
- » Lack of emotion
- » Lack of energy
- » Paranoia, fear
- » Withdrawal from family and friends
- » Disregard for personal appearance
- » Problems with memory, attention and the ability to plan and make decisions
- » Flat or inappropriate emotions

How is Schizophrenia Treated?

Even though schizophrenia is a lifelong disease, treatment and recovery are possible through various targeted approaches including the use of medication and support services.

Medications are the cornerstone of symptom management but are not themselves sufficient to promote recovery. Rehabilitation strategies including work, school, and relationship goals are also essential and need to be addressed in creating a plan of care.

Family and friends can plan an important role in helping a loved one with schizophrenia stay on track with their medicine. Training programs that teach family and friends problem-solving and communication skills can improve relationships and lessen the chance of relapse.