

Patient education: Schizoaffective disorder (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

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What is schizoaffective disorder?

Schizoaffective disorder is a brain disorder that is similar to schizophrenia, but also causes symptoms of depression or bipolar disorder.

What are the symptoms of schizoaffective disorder?

People with schizoaffective disorder have the same symptoms as people with schizophrenia. These can include:

- Seeing or hearing things that are not really there
- Believing things that are not true
- Having trouble thinking, speaking, and expressing emotions normally

In addition, people with schizoaffective disorder have "mood episodes." These can involve 1 or both of the following:

- "Manic episodes" – This means feeling extremely happy and high energy for some time. During an episode, the person might also be much more active than usual, not sleep a lot, make poor choices, and get angry quickly.
- "Depressive episodes" – This means feeling very sad most of the time. People might also feel very tired, not enjoy things, and feel bad about themselves. It can even make people think about hurting or killing themselves.

To be diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder, a person must have symptoms of schizophrenia for at least 2 weeks **without** the mood episodes. But both types of symptoms can also happen at the same time.

Is there a test for schizoaffective disorder?

No. But your doctor or nurse should be able to tell if you have it by learning about your symptoms and doing an exam.

Get help right away if you are thinking of hurting or killing yourself!

If you ever feel like you might hurt yourself or someone else, help is available:

- In the US, contact the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:
 - To speak to someone, call or text **988**.
 - To talk to someone online, go to www.988lifeline.org/chat.
- Call your doctor or nurse, and tell them that it is an emergency.
- **Call for an ambulance** (in the US and Canada, **call 9-1-1**).
- Go to the emergency department at your local hospital.

How is schizoaffective disorder treated?

If you are at risk of hurting yourself or others, you might need to stay in the hospital for a short time. In the hospital, doctors can treat symptoms and keep you safe.

Schizoaffective disorder is managed with medicines to:

- Help control symptoms of schizophrenia
- Help keep your mood stable and prevent big mood changes

Sometimes, people need to try a few different medicines before finding the ones that work best. Medicines can also cause side effects. Tell your doctor if your medicines cause side effects that bother you.

People with schizoaffective disorder usually need to take medicines for the rest of their life. It's important to take them exactly as directed. Otherwise, symptoms could get worse.

Different types of counseling and therapy can also help.

What if I want to get pregnant?

If you want to get pregnant, talk to your doctor before you start trying. Most people with schizoaffective disorder need to keep taking medicines before and during pregnancy. But some people need to switch to different medicines.

More on this topic

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