

# About Illness

This section will cover some basic information about schizophrenia and how to take care of yourself when you have schizophrenia.

## What is Schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a disorder that affects how a person thinks, feels, and behaves. It manifests usually in late adolescence or early adulthood.

# Myths & misconceptions

Schizophrenia is one of the poorly understood illnesses in our society. There are various myths associated with it. Evidence gathered from studies and real narratives indicate that the following myths (though prevalent) are not true.

## **Myth 1:**

*Schizophrenia is a rare condition.*

## **Fact:**

Schizophrenia is not a rare condition. The lifetime risk of developing schizophrenia is widely accepted to be around 1 in 100. People living with schizophrenia prefer not to talk about it due to the stigma attached. This makes the illness seem rare or non-existent.



## **Myth 2:**

*There is no treatment for schizophrenia.*

## **Fact:**

There are many effective treatments available for Schizophrenia. Long-term treatment may be required (as required in the case of many other chronic physical illnesses such as diabetes, blood pressure), but when treated properly, many people with schizophrenia are able to enjoy fulfilling and productive lives.



### **Myth 3:**

*Patients with schizophrenia cannot lead a healthy and fruitful life.*

### **Fact:**

Treatment, if started early, can lead to decrease in symptoms and improvement in functioning of patients with schizophrenia. There are interventions that that can help the person lead a more productive life.

The above myths and misconceptions are baseless. It is important that we challenge these wrong perceptions. You should talk openly with your doctor about any query or concern you may have. This will help you get factual and scientific information.



# What are the symptoms of schizophrenia?

The common symptoms of schizophrenia, as experienced by most people, can be divided into three categories:

1. Positive symptoms
2. Negative symptoms
3. Cognitive symptoms

A person may experience symptoms only from any one of these categories or some symptoms from all of these categories.

# 1. Positive Symptoms



**Hallucination:** Person perceives things that don't actually exist in reality. These may include seeing things, hearing voices, or smelling things that others around them can't see, hear or smell.

**Delusions:** These are false beliefs that don't change even when the person who holds them is presented with new/ contradicting ideas or facts.

People who have positive symptoms often also face other problems like confused thinking, difficulty in concentrating or the sense that their thoughts are blocked.

**Tip:** Both hallucinations and delusions are symptoms of the illness and continued medication helps in alleviation of these symptoms.

## 2. Negative Symptoms



Negative Symptoms are associated with disturbance and disruption in the normal emotions and behaviour of a person. You may observe that:

- You don't feel any interest in the day-to-day activities.
- You don't feel like interacting with people.
- Even basic activities (like brushing your teeth, eating your meals on time, getting out of bed) may appear difficult.

**Tip:** There are some basic things that can help if you are experiencing negative symptoms. Prepare a schedule of daily activities and try and follow it as much as possible. Try to engage in activities that interest you. Don't minimize any effort that you are making. Every step counts.



### 3. Cognitive Symptoms

Cognitive symptoms include trouble in focussing attention, poor ability to understand the information, difficulty in making decisions about seemingly simple issues and trouble in implementing the instructions.



## Other Symptoms

- Changes in ordinary behaviour, like staying alone most of the time, getting irritated at small things etc.
- Changes in sleep pattern, such as staying awake late at night, preferring to spend most of the time in bed.
- Exhibiting peculiar behaviour, such as smiling without any reason, talking to oneself and mostly staying alone by oneself.
- Maintaining poor hygiene like not taking a bath or brushing your teeth.
- Having trouble in speaking clearly.
- Feeling anxious.

In case you are exhibiting any of these symptoms, please do not ignore the same and do speak with your doctor about it.

# What are the causes of Schizophrenia?

There are numerous factors that lead to the development of schizophrenia in an individual:

## 1. Neurotransmitter Imbalance:

The brain is made up of nerve cells, called neurons, and chemicals, called neurotransmitters.

An imbalance of these neurotransmitters, especially, dopamine, is thought to cause the symptoms of schizophrenia.

The medications, used for the treatment of schizophrenia, try to restore the imbalance of neurotransmitters.



## **2. Genetics:**

Scientists have known that sometimes schizophrenia runs in families. People who have a close relative with schizophrenia are more likely to develop the disorder than people who have no relatives with this illness.

Scientists believe that many different genes may increase the risk of developing schizophrenia, but no single gene causes the disorder by itself. It is not yet possible to use genetic information to predict who will or will not develop schizophrenia.

There are many people who have schizophrenia but don't have a family member with the disorder and conversely, many people with one or more family members with the disorder, do not develop it themselves.

### 3. Environmental Factors:

Scientists also believe that interactions between genes and certain aspects of the individual's environment are necessary for schizophrenia to develop. Such environmental factors can be: exposure to certain viruses, malnutrition before birth, problems during birth, psychosocial factors etc.

Their interaction differs from individual to individual and depends on one's unique biological make and psychosocial environment.



You may often wonder, “Why it happened to me?”

Numerous factors lead to the development of schizophrenia in an individual. These factors interact in multiple and complex ways, thus it is not possible to predict what exactly might have caused the illness. It is important to acknowledge that there is no one single factor to be held responsible for it.



# How to tell others about your illness?

In life, you may encounter a situation where other people misunderstand your illness or have misconceptions about it. You can share the facts about your illness given on page numbers 34 to 41.

Don't feel ashamed of your illness, it can happen to anybody. A person with schizophrenia can lead a normal life with appropriate treatment and support.



# What are the available treatments & therapies?

Good news is that we have many effective and proven treatments and therapies available for schizophrenia:

## 1. Pharmacological Treatment:

Antipsychotic medications are usually taken daily in pill form. Some antipsychotics are available in liquid form. Some antipsychotics are also available as injections that are administered once or twice a month. Few people have side-effects when they start taking medications, but most side-effects can be tackled with. Doctors and patients can work together to find the best medication or medication combination and the right dose.



## **2. Psychosocial Treatment:**

This treatment involves the learning of specific psychological and social skills by the patient and his/her family members to address the everyday challenges of schizophrenia.

## **3. Other Treatments:**

Certain biological treatments are available for patients whose symptoms do not respond to conventional treatment methods. One such treatment that has been found to be effective is electroconvulsive therapy (ECT).

The treatment plan of a patient is formulated on a case-to-case basis by a mental health professional after thorough assessment. For treatment to be successful, it is important to follow the treatment regimen diligently and go for regular follow-ups with the doctor.

# How can I take care of myself?

## 1. Treatment Adherence:

Please take the prescribed medication regularly. You can use reminder techniques, such as setting an alarm, maintaining a pills box etc.

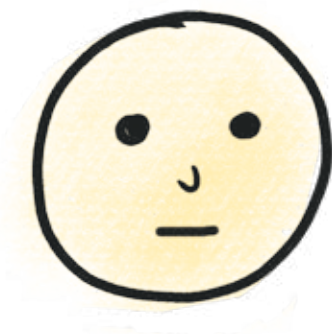
If there is any discomfort or side-effects, discuss with your treating doctor, instead of stopping the treatment abruptly.

Maintain regular follow-ups with the treating doctor. It serves many purposes. It helps in monitoring medicinal compliance and in adjusting the dose of medicines, if required. It also aids in the discussion of any issue.



## 2. Know the early signs of recurrence of symptoms:

Discuss the early warning signs of recurrence of symptoms with the treating psychiatrist. Develop a plan of action with your doctor and close family member(s) about what can be done as soon as you see the early signs of the recurrence of symptoms.



## 3. Daily Routine:

It is important to prepare a daily schedule and follow it as much as possible.

#### **4. Taking Care of Diet:**

Meals should be taken at the scheduled time and not erratically. All family members should try and eat together and have a healthy balanced diet. Please refer to the module on 'Eating Right' for more details.

#### **5. Staying Physically Active:**

Along with healthy eating habits, regular physical exercises and addressing physical health concerns are important to ensure physical well-being. These can be followed by all family members as a habit. Please refer to the module on 'Physical Activity' for more details.

## 6. Physical Health Monitoring:

Your doctor may ask you to get some common and vital tests done. Get the tests done immediately and share the test reports with your doctor. Please refer to the module on 'Health Monitoring' for more details.

In case of any health concern, talk to your doctor immediately. Don't take over the counter medicines without consulting your doctor.



## 7. Seek Support:

- Find support systems available to you within your family or around you.
- Try to participate in everyday family discussions and activities.
- Don't abstain yourself from family functions, celebrating festivals or special days and family functions.
- Share your thoughts, feelings and concerns with the people you trust. Listen to their concerns as well.



Following the techniques shared here will lead to gradual improvements. Please remember that it is important to follow them regularly to see the changes over time

