

Schizophrenia

Overview:

- Schizophrenia is a serious mental disorder that affects the way a patient: thinks, acts, expresses emotions, perceives reality and relates to others.
- Contrary to popular belief, schizophrenia is not a split or multiple personality. It is a type of mental illness in which a person can't tell what's real from what's imagined.
- Schizophrenia is a chronic that requires lifelong treatment.

Causes:

The exact cause of schizophrenia is still unknown, but researchers believe that a combination of genetics, brain chemistry and environment contributes to development of the disorder. Problems with certain naturally occurring brain chemicals, including neurotransmitters like dopamine may contribute to schizophrenia.

Symptoms:

In men, schizophrenia symptoms typically start in the early to mid-20s. In women, symptoms typically begin in the late 20s. It's uncommon for children to be diagnosed with schizophrenia and rare for those older than age 45.

Schizophrenia involves a range of problems with thinking (cognition), behavior or emotions. Signs and symptoms may vary, but usually they reflect an impaired ability to function. Symptoms may include:

- **Delusions:** These are false beliefs that are not based in reality. These beliefs are firmly-held by the patient despite clear and obvious evidence that they are not true. For example, schizophrenics may believe that they are being harmed or harassed; or that they have exceptional abilities and talents; or that their actions are being controlled by outside

forces; or that their bodies are not functioning properly. 4 out of every 5 schizophrenia patients suffer from delusions.

- **Hallucinations:** These usually involve seeing or hearing things that don't exist. Hallucinations can be in any of the senses, but hearing voices is the most common hallucination.
- **Disorganized thinking:** This can be inferred from disorganized speech. Effective communication can be impaired, and answers to questions may be illogical or completely unrelated.
- **Disorganized or abnormal motor behavior:** This may show in a number of ways, such as useless and excessive movements or behaving in a childlike unpredictable manner.

Risk factors of Schizophrenia:

Although the exact cause of schizophrenia isn't known, certain factors seem to increase the risk of developing or triggering schizophrenia, including:

- Having a family history of schizophrenia.
- Certain viral infections.
- Malnutrition during pregnancy, especially in the first and second trimesters.
- Increased immune system activation, such as from autoimmune diseases
- Taking mind-altering and hallucinogenic drugs.

Complications:

Left untreated, schizophrenia can result in serious psychological, behavioral and health issues, such as:

- Suicide.
- Self-harm.
- Anxiety and terror.
- Depression.
- Alcohol and drug abuse.

- Homelessness.
- Family disputes.
- Inability to work or study.
- Social isolation.

Diagnosis:

To diagnose schizophrenia, the doctor examines the patient's genetic and medical history and asks questions about the patient's symptoms and family history. Blood tests and brain scans are also done to help rule out other conditions with similar symptoms.

Treatment:

Schizophrenia requires lifelong treatment, even when symptoms have subsided.

Treatment is divided into:

1. Treatment with medications
2. and psychosocial therapy.

In some severe cases, hospitalization may be needed to ensure the patient's safety, proper nutrition, adequate sleep and basic hygiene.

Clinical Health Education Department

For further questions kindly contact us via email:

Hpromotion@moh.gov.sa