

# HANDOUT – SCHIZOPHRENIA

## What is schizophrenia?

Contrary to the common misconception, schizophrenia does not mean "split or multiple personality." And, although people with schizophrenia often are portrayed as violent on television and in movies, that is seldom the case. Schizophrenia is one of the most disabling and puzzling mental disorders. Just as "cancer" refers to numerous related illnesses, many researchers now consider schizophrenia to be a group of mental disorders rather than a single illness.

## How is schizophrenia developed?

Generally, schizophrenia begins in late adolescence or early adulthood. Research indicates a genetic link to the development of schizophrenia. A child who has one parent with schizophrenia, for example, has about a 10 percent chance of developing the illness, compared with a one percent chance if neither parent has schizophrenia. Current research implicates abnormalities in both the brain's structure and biochemical activities. Researchers also tend to agree that environmental influences may be involved in the onset of schizophrenia.

## More information about schizophrenia:

**Symptoms:** Psychotic, or "positive," symptoms include delusions (bizarre thoughts that have no basis in reality); hallucinations (hearing voices, seeing nonexistent things, and experiencing sensations, such as burning, that have no source); and disordered thinking (apparent from a person's fragmented, disconnected and sometimes nonsensical speech). Other "negative" symptoms include social withdrawal, extreme apathy, diminished motivation, and blunted emotional expression.

**Formal Diagnosis:** Active symptoms of the illness (such as a psychotic episode) for at least two weeks, with other symptoms lasting six months.

**Treatment:** People who have schizophrenia often require medication to control the most troubling symptoms. Antipsychotic medications help bring biochemical imbalances closer to normal. The newer drugs may also be effective for symptoms such as social withdrawal, extreme apathy, and blunted emotional expression. More such drugs are being developed.

**Recovery:** After these symptoms are controlled, psychotherapy and self-help groups can assist people who have schizophrenia learn to develop social skills, cope with stress, identify early warning signs of relapse, and prolong periods of remission. In addition, support groups and family therapy can give loved ones a better understanding of the illness and help them provide the compassion and support that play an important role in recovery. The good news is that more many of those who have schizophrenia can work, live in the community or with their families, and enjoy friends if they receive continuous, appropriate treatment. According to The National Alliance on Mental Illness, treatment of schizophrenia is successful in 60 percent of patients.

**Note:** This fact sheet is intended only as a starting point for gaining an understanding about schizophrenia. It is by no means exhaustive, nor does it include the full range of symptoms and treatments. Keep in mind that new research can yield rapid and dramatic changes in our understanding of, and approaches to, mental disorders. This fact sheet should not be viewed as a replacement for seeking competent professional advice or other forms of support.

**For more information** as well as referrals to specialists and self-help groups in your State, contact:

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill  
Colonial Place Three  
2107 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 300  
Arlington, VA 22201-3042  
Telephone: 800-950-6264  
Fax: 703-524-9094  
(TDD): 703-516-7227  
**www.nami.org**

National Mental Health Association  
2001 N. Beauregard Street - 12th Floor  
Alexandria, VA 22311  
Telephone: 800-969-6642  
Fax: 703-684-5968  
(TDD): 800-433-5959  
**www.nmha.org**

*Note: These are suggested resources. It is not meant to be a complete list.*

KEN98-0052  
04/03

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
Center for Mental Health Services  
<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/ken98-0052/default.asp>