

Steve did not know what was happening to him. Lately he had begun feeling very detached from life. He had difficulty speaking; every sentence was brief, disorganized, and strange. Also, his thought patterns were becoming more and more distorted, and oftentimes he would move very slowly, if he moved at all.

-----Schizophrenia-----

What Is Schizophrenia?

Steve demonstrates the negative and disorganized symptoms of schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is a serious brain disorder that affects a person's ability to think clearly, manage emotions, distinguish reality from unreality, make decisions, and relate to others. It is a complex, chronic medical illness whose first signs typically emerge in the teenage years or early twenties.

What Are the Symptoms of Schizophrenia?

There are three general categories of symptoms:

Positive→ overt symptoms that should not be there

- **hallucinations:** individuals hear or see things that are not there
- **delusions:** individuals believe things that are false, such as that people are reading their thoughts, or they are controlling other people's minds

Negative→ a lack of characteristics that should be there

- emotional flatness/lack of expression
- inability to start or follow through with activities
- speech that is brief and lacks content
- lack of pleasure/interest in life

Disorganized

- confused thinking and speech
- slower movement
- repeating rhythmic gestures
- trouble communicating in coherent sentences

What Causes Schizophrenia?

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Although scientists still do not know the specific causes of schizophrenia, research suggests that the disorder is primarily linked to problems in brain chemistry and brain structure. Schizophrenia seems to be caused by a combination of problems, including genetic vulnerability as well as environmental factors that occur during a person's development.

How Is Schizophrenia Treated?

While there is no cure for schizophrenia, it can be successfully treated using several different methods:

- Medication: controls the symptoms of schizophrenia by correcting a chemical imbalance in the brain
 - Conventional antipsychotics: earlier medications that worked in essentially the same way to relieve hallucinations, delusions, and thinking problems
 - Atypical antipsychotics: a new generation of antipsychotic drugs that may be better than the conventional drugs at relieving the negative symptoms, like withdrawal, problems in thinking, and a lack of interest/energy

****Atypical antipsychotics have more tolerable side effects than the conventional antipsychotics. However, atypical antipsychotics can have some different side effects that can be serious. Therefore, additional maintenance may be required, such as frequent blood monitoring. Talk to your doctor about which medications work best for you****

- Psychosocial Rehabilitation: programs designed to help those with mental illness stay out of the hospital and live independently.
 - PACT (Program for Assertive Community Treatment) is one of the most effective rehabilitation programs for those with mental illnesses and/or substance abuse problems. The program consists of professionals who meet their clients where they live, providing at-home support at whatever level is needed.
- Hospitalization: most people who are diagnosed with schizophrenia need to be hospitalized for a period of time when their symptoms are severe. Once they are on a course of medication that works for them, treatment usually consists of services found outside the hospital, such as rehabilitation and day programs.

****Most people with schizophrenia can get better with treatment that is available today, and the future is promising****

What Help Does a Person with Schizophrenia Need?

Understanding, compassion, and respect are key to helping people deal with this disorder. Like anyone else with a serious illness, they also need help with the fear and isolation caused by their

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disorder and the stigma surrounding it. They may need help in understanding that they need treatment, as well as the fact that they need to stay in treatment. In addition, they may need help with the tasks associated with daily living.

I Think My Friend Has Schizophrenia; How Can I Help?

The best thing that you can do for someone you think may have schizophrenia is to help that person find medical treatment that works, and then encourage him or her to stick with it. Also, try your best to understand what your friend is going through and why the illness causes upsetting or difficult behavior. If you must deal with bizarre behavior, do your best to stay calm. Do not criticize; be clear and direct in whatever you say and do not talk too much. While violence is not likely to occur, if their behavior becomes violent or dangerous, stay calm, state quietly that you care and want to help them, and make sure not to make any sudden or threatening moves. If you cannot stop dangerous behavior, your last resort is to call the police.

Warning: Regular or heavy alcohol use can worsen most psychological states, such as anxiety, depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, or eating problems. Alcohol can change the way a person feels in the short run; however, the overall effect only worsens a disorder. Marijuana and other drugs can have similar or more serious effects on the brain.

Contact the NAMI HelpLine at: 1-800-950-NAMI (6264) or visit www.nami.org.
Visit the National Institutes of Mental Health web site: www.nimh.nih.gov.
Other helpful web sites include: www.schizophrenia.com and www.mentalhealth.com
Screening for Mental Health www.mentalhealth.org
American College Counseling Association www.collegecounseling.org
National Panhellenic Conference www.npcwomen.org
National Organization for People of Color Against Suicide (NOPCAS) www.nopcas.org
National Latino Behavioral Health Association www.nlbha.org
National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association www.naapimha.org
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention www.afsp.org

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