



# SCHIZOPHRENIA

## What is Schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a complex mental disorder that affects the way a person thinks, feels, and behaves. Due to the severity of its symptoms, for some people, Schizophrenia can be a highly debilitating disorder.

There are three categories of symptoms in Schizophrenia:

**Positive Symptoms** – Positive does not mean good, it means *adding* something to the person's personality or being. These include hallucinations, delusions, disorganized thinking, and disorganized behaviour.

**Negative Symptoms** – Negative does not mean bad, it means *taking away* from the person's personality or being. These can include depression type symptoms of changes in sleep, low mood, lack of self care as well as poverty of speech, and an inability to experience pleasure.

**Cognitive Symptoms** – These can include problems with attention, memory, and impaired social cognition (ex. difficulty connecting with others).

## Who can have Schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia develops most commonly in males and females who are in their early 20s, although early (prodromal) symptoms that indicate that the disorder is about to occur may be present in adolescence. While biological, psychological, and social factors all come into play in the development of Schizophrenia, the genetic component of this disorder is particularly high. However, it is also important to note that environmental factors may trigger the onset of this disorder in those who are already genetically predisposed. These include extreme trauma and drug use.



# SCHIZOPHRENIA

## **Should I be concerned?**

For people who are experiencing these symptoms for the first time, it is highly recommended that you attend your doctors office, or local emergency department as soon as possible. Much research shows that early intervention in psychotic illnesses leads to the highest recovery and wellness rates.

Some people live with their symptoms daily, and have happy and high functioning lives. You should worry about these individuals if their presence and demeanour change, if they start behaving inappropriately or oddly.

Often times when people are experiencing hallucinations or delusions they are not in danger. You should be concerned if the person seems as though they are at immediate risk to themselves or someone else. Or if they are experiencing so many symptoms, they are currently unable to care for themselves.

People living with a psychotic illness are much more likely to be the victims of violent crime than be the perpetrators, so please use kindness and respect and avoid fear and judgement.

## **How can I help?**

If you have a family member or loved one who has Schizophrenia, try your best to work with them in their recovery process. Remember that stress can exacerbate existing symptoms, so it may be helpful to have a discussion with the individual to figure out what they need in order to relax and manage their symptoms. If the person has not yet sought professional support, direct them to the appropriate resources so that they are able to get help in working around their challenges and maintaining wellness. Treatment for every patient is unique so it is important to use the appropriate resources that are available.



# SCHIZOPHRENIA

## Resources

- <http://www.schizophrenia.ca>
- <http://www.earlypsychosis.ca>
- Listening Support (Kingston) – 613-544-1771
- <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/schizophrenia/index.shtml>
- <https://www.amhs-kfla.ca/>

