

# DIAGNOSING SCHIZOPHRENIA

Before reaching a diagnosis of schizophrenia, it is important to rule out other illnesses. Other medical illnesses can mimic schizophrenic symptoms. For this reason a medical history, laboratory tests, and a physical examination should be taken before concluding that a person has schizophrenia. In addition, some commonly abused drugs can cause symptoms of schizophrenia. That is why it is imperative that blood and urine samples be taken from the person and tested to detect the presence of these drugs.

The diagnosis of schizophrenia is usually made by a medical doctor who specializes in mental and emotional conditions. This type of physician is called a psychiatrist.

*"When I arrived at the hospital, the emergency room physician took my vitals, drew blood, and obtained a urine sample. Afterwards, he asked questions to rule out organic causes of my symptoms and to determine if I had taken any drugs. After the physical examination, I was admitted and placed on the psychiatric unit. A nurse then escorted me to a room where she began to ask questions about my mood, sleep patterns, suicidal thoughts, symptoms, and duration of my symptoms. She also took a family history. This procedure is called an assessment, which lasted approximately 1 hour. The next day I was seen by a psychiatrist who diagnosed my condition as schizoaffective disorder."*

*the average person."*

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# SCHIZOPHRENIA IS...

Schizophrenia is a brain disorder involving profound distortions of thought, such as hallucinations, delusions, or extreme confusion. It is one of the most serious of the mental illnesses in terms of suffering and disability. Nevertheless, about a quarter of those diagnosed with schizophrenia recover completely, and the majority of the rest improve with medical treatment and other supports. In all, about 1 percent of the population develops schizophrenia, that is, about 2.5 million people in the United States. The most common age for developing symptoms is between the ages of 18 and 25. Research does show, however, that schizophrenia does show up in childhood, but only 2 percent of individuals with schizophrenia had their onset in childhood.

Schizophrenia is not the same as split-personality or multiple personality disorder, and it is not the result of bad parenting or a weakness of character. Most scientists believe that schizophrenia is a biologically-based illness of the brain. And most people with schizophrenia are no more violent than the average person.

## SYMPTOMS OF SCHIZOPHRENIA

One of the most frequent symptoms of schizophrenia is "hearing voices" that others cannot hear, what are called auditory hallucinations. The patient may carry on conversations with these voices, or hear two hallucinatory voices carrying on a conversation themselves. Sometimes the voices can give commands or make comments on the patient's actions.

*Other symptoms of schizophrenia can include:*

- ✦ Visual hallucinations, or false sensations of smell, touch, or taste
- ✦ Delusions of grandeur (for example, thinking one is a person of higher power)
- ✦ Delusions of persecution (as in thinking one is being watched or is a victim of a conspiracy)
- ✦ Disorganized or bizarre thinking and behavior
- ✦ Being extremely withdrawn, expressionless, or apathetic (such as isolating oneself from family or friends)

## EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Other visible signs that difficulties may be forming (which sometimes can be early warnings of schizophrenia) include changes in personal hygiene and appearance, changes in personality, changes in sleep patterns, not showing up for work or school, or pronounced inappropriate or bizarre behavior.

*"I stood up and pronounced in a loud voice at church services, for the priest to 'Shut up—we've had enough!'"*

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF SCHIZOPHRENIA

There are different labels for various clusters of symptoms. The most common types and related subtypes are paranoid schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorder, respectively. A person with paranoid schizophrenia may feel persecuted, suspicious, or they may believe that the CIA or FBI are after them. An individual with schizoaffective disorder experiences symptoms of schizophrenia and a major mood disorder.

## CAUSES OF SCHIZOPHRENIA

While the symptoms of the illness have been documented for centuries, even today no one knows exactly what causes schizophrenia. Theories abound, some in favor, some out of favor. Historically, some people thought schizophrenia was either a possession by demons or an early onset of senility. Another popular theory, now discredited, was that it was caused by a bad relationship between the mother and a child. More probable causes, made evident with the advancement of medications and science, are that a person with schizophrenia has a brain chemistry that is "out of balance." Other researchers point to a viral infection of the fetus at a crucial time in development. Also, in the most modern research, genetic causes are being explored.

***"Most people with schizophrenia are no more violent than"***