

Schizophrenia

Information for individuals, partners and families

NCMH

National Centre for Mental Health
Canolfan Iechyd Meddwl Genedlaethol

Schizophrenia



Ymchwil Iechyd
a Gofal Cymru
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Schizophrenia is a mental illness that affects thinking, experiences, feelings and behaviour. It affects around 1% of the population at some point in their lives.

It affects people from all backgrounds.

Most people diagnosed with schizophrenia first develop the condition between the ages of 16 and 35.

The symptoms of schizophrenia can include seeing or hearing things that are not there (called hallucinations) or developing new, unusual beliefs (called delusions).

Schizophrenia can also cause confused thinking which can make it difficult to follow the meaning of people's speech.

Hallucinations, delusions and confused thoughts are sometimes referred to as 'positive symptoms' of schizophrenia.

In addition to these symptoms people sometimes have difficulty with motivation to complete everyday tasks and may withdraw from social situations.

These are known as 'negative symptoms' of schizophrenia. Some people with schizophrenia may notice a change in their ability to concentrate as well.

Having schizophrenia does not mean that a person has a 'split-personality'.

The name of the condition, from the Greek words for 'fractured mind', hints at the divide between perception and reality that emerges in those with this disorder.

The media often stereotypes people with the condition as dangerous or violent - this is rare, and people with schizophrenia are more likely to be victims of crime.

We do not know exactly what causes schizophrenia, but genetics and life experiences both play a part.

Several factors have been identified which can put someone at increased risk of developing schizophrenia:

- having a close relative with schizophrenia

- use of illegal drugs, including cannabis and amphetamines
- traumatic life events (especially in childhood)

In most cases, exactly how these things increase the risk is not yet known.

Getting help

If you think you or someone close to you may have the symptoms we have described here, it is important to speak to a GP or other health professional as soon as possible.

The earlier the condition is diagnosed and treated, the better the outcome tends to be for the person affected.

Most people with these symptoms will be referred to mental health services for assessment.

If someone is given a diagnosis of schizophrenia or psychosis, they should receive a care plan outlining how health and social care services will be able to help.



Treatments for schizophrenia

There is no cure for schizophrenia, but for most people, symptoms can be improved by treatment.

Many people with the illness go on to work, have relationships and live a stable life.

A group of medicines called antipsychotics are often used to reduce symptoms of psychosis. There is evidence that these medicines work well for large numbers of people, especially in controlling hallucinations and delusions.

A small number of people may not benefit very much from these treatments. It may take a trial of a few different medications to find which works best for an individual and to balance benefits with side effects.

Psychological treatments can also help, and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends that people with schizophrenia

should be offered a combination of medicine and talking therapies.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) works by helping the person to identify unwanted thoughts and feelings and change them.

Other kinds of support such as family intervention therapy can be very useful too. This focuses on helping families understand schizophrenia, and how best to support their relative.

It also tries to identify and reduce things in the person's environment, such as stress, that can cause relapses or prevent the best possible recovery.

Sometimes, people with schizophrenia may need to spend time in hospital until they recover from symptoms of psychosis. Others may need a lot of support in their day-to-day lives on a longer-term basis.

Tips for people with schizophrenia

Taking medication

It's important to keep taking your medication unless your doctor advises otherwise. This is true even if you feel well, as the medicine can stop symptoms returning.

Stopping the medicine can lead to symptoms returning.

Stopping suddenly can have other negative effects too, depending on your specific treatment.

If you have any worries about your medication or its side effects, speak to your doctor. There are usually ways of managing side effects, but if not, then other tablets may be available.

Share your experiences

Talk to other people with experience of schizophrenia. It can help to know you're not the only one, and they might be able to offer advice on managing the condition.

Know your symptoms

Symptoms vary a lot between different people. Learn to recognise what happens when you become unwell and be aware of the warning signs. This should be a part of your care plan, and it can be useful to share these details with your family.

Get professional advice

Consult your GP, psychiatrist, or pharmacist before taking any new over-the-counter drugs, and avoid illegal ones altogether - the latter will almost certainly make things worse.

Look after yourself

Try to stay as physically healthy as possible - eating healthily, exercising and getting enough sleep are also good for keeping mentally well.

Some medications can cause weight gain as a side effect, so keep an eye on your weight after starting a new treatment - the team looking after you should do this too.

Avoid alcohol and drugs

Becoming stressed and using alcohol or drugs to make yourself feel better can make the condition worse and lead to becoming unwell.

Make a change

Lifestyle changes, such as giving up smoking, can make a real difference to your health. If you planning to cut down or give up smoking, ask advice from your doctor and mental health team.

Tips for partners, families and carers

- The symptoms of schizophrenia can be a difficult for partners, families and carers to understand, so it's important to learn as much as you can about it. Find out about the symptoms and the warning signs of a relapse.
- Build up a good relationship with the health professionals treating the person with schizophrenia. Don't be afraid to ask questions or share your concerns with them.
- Make a plan with the person with schizophrenia so you know what to do if they show signs of becoming unwell.
- Go to appointments with the person with schizophrenia whenever possible and encourage them to ask questions for themselves.
- Let them know they are doing well. Coping with schizophrenia can be a huge challenge, and a positive approach can really help.
- Where possible try to do things with the person rather than for them. This will help them to be independent and empower them to do things for themselves.

Useful websites

NCMH

Our website has a dedicated schizophrenia section, including details on research, suggested reading and links to medication information.

ncmh.info/schizophrenia

Royal College of Psychiatrists

This site provides a detailed patient information leaflet about schizophrenia in several languages as well as other mental health information. Search 'schizophrenia' from the homepage.

rcpsych.ac.uk

Rethink

Detailed information on the condition including types of schizophrenia, treatments, the risks and more.

rethink.org/schizophrenia

Mind

Information and support along with downloadable leaflets and real stories. Search 'schizophrenia' from the homepage.

mind.org.uk

Brain and Genomics Hub

We are working with the Brain and Genomics Hub to build a community of 600 people with lived experience of schizophrenia. To find out more about the Hub's ongoing work to improve diagnosis and treatment of severe mental illness, please visit:

ncmh.info/bsprint



Join our NCMH research community

Join our research community today and help us better understand conditions like schizophrenia. The aim of our research is to improve diagnosis, treatment, and support for people in the future.

Joining our community is easy - it involves completing an online sign-up form which takes about 15 minutes and will ask you about:

- personal information, like date of birth and ethnicity
- mental and physical health
- lifestyle

To join, visit: ncmh.info/join

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Mae'r wybodaeth hon hefyd ar gael drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg. I ofyn am gopi, cysylltwch â ni.

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