

## SCHIZOPHRENIA: AT-A-GLANCE

### ABOUT THE DISORDER

Schizophrenia is a severe, chronic, and debilitating mental illness. It affects more than 2 million Americans over the age of 18, and roughly 1 out of every 100 people worldwide.

Schizophrenia significantly affects a person's ability to think, feel, and act. Symptoms vary widely, and are generally classified as positive, negative, or cognitive:

- **Positive symptoms** include psychotic behaviors typically not seen in healthy people, such as delusions, hallucinations, and disorganized thoughts and speech.
- **Negative symptoms** include loss of normal functions, resulting in symptoms such as impoverished thought and speech, emotional blunting, and loss of motivation.
- **Cognitive symptoms** are highly disabling and include deficits in attention, memory, verbal fluency, and executive function (notably the ability to regulate thought, emotion, and behavior in accordance with goals).

### DIAGNOSIS

Schizophrenia typically begins in the teens and early twenties with a “prodrome” that may be difficult to distinguish from other psychiatric problems. Typically the prodrome involves a drop in grades, social withdrawal, sleep problems, irritability, and when measured, a decline in multiple cognitive functions. Later, mild psychotic symptoms begin to manifest — the person may become suspicious and begin to experience hallucinations. The diagnosis is often not made, however, until a florid psychotic episode develops.

There is no simple diagnostic test for schizophrenia, and thus clinicians must consider other causes of psychosis, including severe mood disorders and substance abuse disorders.

### TREATMENT

The underlying causes of schizophrenia remain unknown, so current treatments focus on reducing or eliminating symptoms. Treatments include antipsychotic medications and various psychosocial treatments, which increasingly include therapies aimed at cognitive remediation.

### CAUSES

Schizophrenia is highly influenced by genes, but brain development and environmental risk factors also play a role. The illness is characterized by abnormal thinning of the cerebral cortex, especially the prefrontal cortex, with loss of neural processes. These physical changes in the brain are thought to underlie the decrements in cognitive ability observed in schizophrenia.

*The material above is collected from the following sources:*

- National Institute of Mental Health ([website](#), [PDF](#))
  - World Health Organization ([website](#))
  - National Alliance on Mental Illness ([website](#), [fact sheet](#))
  - Brain and Behavior Research Foundation, formerly NARSAD ([website](#))
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