

*Patient Education Sheet***What is Schizophrenia?****What is schizophrenia?**

Schizophrenia is a mental or behavioral health disorder that interferes with normal thinking and functioning. People with schizophrenia may:

- Hear or see things that are not there, called hallucinations
- Believe things that are not true, called delusions
- Feel as if they are being watched or that others are trying to hurt them, called paranoia
- Experience negative changes in overall appearance or hygiene
- Feel angry toward others
- Have difficulty managing mood or feelings
- Act in ways that seem strange when out socially

Symptoms commonly develop in late teen years or early adulthood. On rare occasions, schizophrenia has been known to develop during childhood years.

**What causes schizophrenia?**

Although the causes of schizophrenia are unknown, several factors are thought to play a role:

- ✓ **Genetic:** A person's risk of developing schizophrenia is increased if a sibling or parent is affected
- ✓ **Environmental:** It is thought that various environmental factors may contribute to the development of schizophrenia, such as infections, trauma, or poor nutrition at an early age.

- ✓ **Brain chemistry:** Research suggests that certain chemical substances that transmit nerve impulses in the brain, called neurotransmitters, play a strong role in the development of schizophrenia.

**What are the symptoms of schizophrenia?**

There are three main types of symptoms:

1. Presence of abnormal behaviors and changes in thinking, referred to as **Positive symptoms:**
  - a. *Hallucinations* – see, hear, feel, smell things that no one else can
  - b. *Delusions* – believe things that are not true
  - c. *Thought disorder* – difficulty thinking clearly, making up words with no meaning
  - d. *Movement disorders* - agitated body movements, repeating a certain motion over and over, or becoming fixed in one position, called catatonia.
2. Difficulty showing emotions or functioning normally, referred to as **Negative symptoms:**
  - a. Talk in a slow, dull voice with no emotion
  - b. Show no facial expressions, such as smiling or frowning
  - c. Have trouble finding enjoyment in life
  - d. Have trouble planning and/or sticking to activities
  - e. Talk very little to people, even when there is a need to.

3. **Cognitive symptoms** are not easy to see but make it hard for people to hold jobs and/or take care of themselves:
- a. Trouble remembering information
  - b. Trouble using information to make decisions
  - c. Trouble paying attention
  - d. Inability to follow directions
  - e. Inability to complete tasks.

### **How is schizophrenia treated?**

There is no cure for schizophrenia, but there are medications and psychosocial treatments that can help the symptoms.

- ✓ **Medications:** There are several types of antipsychotic medications that can help. The type of medication ordered by your physician depends on your symptoms. Your physician may need to try different ones in order to determine which works best for you.

Medications may cause side effects. Always report any side effects to your physician. These side effects may include:

- Blurred vision
- Uncontrolled body movements, called tardive dyskinesia
- Drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Fast heartbeat
- Feeling of restlessness
- Menstrual problems in women
- Sensitivity to the sun
- Skin rashes
- Body stiffness
- Increased blood sugar (those with diabetes are more prone to this)

- ✓ **Psychosocial treatments:** These treatments help people with schizophrenia to deal with this disorder from day to day. Treatments may include:

- Self-help groups
- Drug and alcohol treatment
- Family therapy and education to teach the family how to cope with the condition and to help their loved one
- Illness management skills to learn how to manage schizophrenia from day to day
- Behavioral therapy sessions to learn how to manage hallucinations, delusions, and paranoia
- Work skills development and training

### **How can I help someone with schizophrenia?**

Caring for and supporting a family member with schizophrenia can be challenging, so it is important that both the person with the condition and his/her family receive support. In some cases, people with schizophrenia may not want or may not recognize that they need help. In such cases, you may need help from the police or a hospital. Physicians at the emergency room can check your loved one and decide what treatments are needed.

Know what your family member's symptoms are and how to get help if they worsen or if new symptoms appear.

**In some cases, people with schizophrenia may have suicidal thoughts. If someone talks about suicide, immediately seek help. Danbury Hospital has a Behavioral Crisis Unit that can be reached by dialing (203)739-7007.**

*For more information, or to learn about the specialized services and programs available at Western Connecticut Health Network, please visit [www.WCHN.org](http://www.WCHN.org)*