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## Schizophrenia Fact Sheet

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Schizophrenia affects one in a hundred people, or approximately 2.5 million Americans. As the most chronic and disabling of the severe mental disorders, schizophrenia is a serious mental illness that affects how a person thinks, feels and acts. The illness may impair a person's ability to manage emotions, interact with others, and think clearly, and may cause difficulty distinguishing between what is real and what is imaginary. The main symptoms of schizophrenia include delusions, hallucination, and disorganized thinking.

Schizophrenia typically develops in the late teens and early twenties. There is no cure for schizophrenia, and most people continue to experience it chronically or episodically throughout their lives. The vast majority of people with schizophrenia are not violent and do not pose a danger to others. With proper treatment, many people with schizophrenia lead productive and fulfilling lives.

### **What Causes Schizophrenia?**

The cause of schizophrenia is still unclear. However, research suggests that genetics or heredity, biology (imbalance in the brain's chemistry), viral infections, and immune disorders may all play a role in the development of schizophrenia. There is evidence that people with a relative who has schizophrenia are more likely to develop it. Also, people with schizophrenia have an imbalance of the neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine, which affects the way they respond to stimuli (e.g., bright lights, loud music). Exposure to a stressful event may trigger the development of schizophrenia in someone already genetically prone.

### **Early Warning Signs of Schizophrenia**

The signs of schizophrenia are different for everyone. Symptoms may develop slowly over months or years or may appear very abruptly. The disease may come and go in cycles of relapse and remission. Paying attention to warning signs and detecting schizophrenia early on greatly increases the chances of recovery.

#### ***Warning Signs***

- Hearing or seeing something that isn't there.
- A constant feeling of being watched.
- Peculiar or nonsensical way of speaking or writing.
- Strange body positioning.
- Feeling indifferent to important situations.
- Deterioration of academic or work performance.
- A change in personal hygiene and appearance.
- A change in personality.
- Increasing withdrawal from social situations.
- Irrational, angry or fearful response to loved ones.
- Inability to sleep or concentrate.
- Inappropriate or bizarre behavior.
- Extreme preoccupation with religion or the occult.

## Symptoms

The symptoms of schizophrenia resemble many of the warning signs noted above, but typically are more extreme and advanced. The symptoms are divided into two categories, “positive,” those which are added to a person’s personality, and “negative,” those which are “lost.”

### “Positive” symptoms

- *Delusions*: False ideas
- *Hallucinations*: Sensing things that don’t exist. The most common is hearing imaginary voices that give commands or comments to the individual.
- *Disordered thinking or speech*: Moving from one topic to another in nonsensical fashion, possibly including making up words or sounds.

### “Negative” symptoms

- Social withdrawal
- Extreme apathy
- Lack of drive or initiative
- Emotional unresponsiveness

## Types of Schizophrenia

There are five types of schizophrenia reflecting a different emphasis or coordination of symptoms.

- *Paranoid schizophrenia*: A person feels extremely suspicious, persecuted, or grandiose, or experiences a combination of these emotions.
- *Disorganized schizophrenia*: A person is often incoherent in speech and thought, but may not have delusions.
- *Catatonic schizophrenia*: A person is withdrawn, mute, negative and often assumes very unusual body positions.
- *Residual schizophrenia*: A person is no longer experiencing delusions or hallucinations, but has no motivation or interest in life.
- *Schizoaffective disorder*: A person has symptoms of both schizophrenia and a major mood disorder, such as depression.

## Treatment

While there is no cure for schizophrenia, many people lead productive lives with proper treatment, which typically includes a combination of drugs, medications, therapies, and rehabilitation, as well as family interventions where appropriate.

**Mental Health America of Franklin County** is a private, not-for-profit organization, established in 1956. We help people navigate the mental health system. We are dedicated to promoting mental health in Franklin County through advocacy, education, and support services. Our programs include: information and referral to community mental health and alcohol/drug services; free support groups for people with mental illness and their families; an Ombudsman program that assists clients in navigating the mental health and alcohol/drug system; mental health screenings in English and Spanish; Pro Bono Counseling Program where underinsured and uninsured individuals can receive free counseling; community and professional mental health education including Get Connected; maternal mental health support and advocacy (POEM); and a quarterly newsletter featuring legislative updates and new happenings at MHAFC. We receive funding from the Franklin County ADAMH Board, United Way of Central Ohio, individuals, foundations, and corporations. To become a member or find out more information, please visit us online at [www.mhafc.org](http://www.mhafc.org).