

## Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a chronic and potentially disabling mental illness. People with schizophrenia often suffer with hallucinations such as hearing internal voices not heard by others, or thought disorders such as believing that other people are controlling their thoughts, or plotting against them.

Symptoms of schizophrenia include hallucinations, delusions, disordered thinking, unusual speech or behavior, and social withdrawal. Significant problems with judgment and reasoning abilities may also be present. Untreated, schizophrenia is considered to be a progressive illness that over time may lead to a decline in basic living skills and routine functioning that many people take for granted. These symptoms often interfere with personal and occupational functioning.

Initial signs of schizophrenia usually begin in the late teens or twenties. Although rare, schizophrenia can also appear in childhood.

Many individuals with this disease alternate between periods of acute decompensation and more stable periods of functioning. About one percent of the general population and more than two million Americans suffer from schizophrenia in any given year. The disease is diagnosed equally in men and women, but symptoms tend to occur earlier in males.

Available treatments can relieve symptoms, and can be very effective with individuals leading full lives. Schizophrenia is a chronic disorder that requires long-term treatment. Supportive psychotherapy focused on the development and maintenance of independent living skills along with teaching compliance with medications are essential components of treatment.