

# Schizophrenia

# Schizophrenia is a diagnosis given to some people who have severely disrupted beliefs and experiences.

During an episode of schizophrenia, a person's understanding and interpretation of the outside world is disrupted - they may lose touch with reality, see or hear things that are not there and act in unusual ways in response to hallucinations. Schizophrenia affects around 26 million people across the world. About 1 in 100 people will have one episode, and two-thirds of these will go on to have further episodes.

## Symptoms

Not everyone with schizophrenia has the same symptoms and the definition of the disorder is wide, including a number of combinations of different things. The three main positive symptoms are:

- feelings of being controlled by outside forces (ie. having thoughts and actions taken over)
- hearing, seeing, smelling or feeling things which are not there (hallucinations)
- irrational and unfounded beliefs (delusions)

The causes are unknown but episodes of schizophrenia appear to be associated with changes in some brain chemicals. Stressful experiences and some recreational drugs can also trigger an episode in vulnerable people.

## Treatments

Despite being a treatable disorder, more than 50% of people with schizophrenia cannot access adequate treatment, and 90% of people with untreated schizophrenia live in the developing world. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) emphasise self-management, peer support, and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), as well as monitoring physical health and the use of medication and other treatments.

## Misconceptions

There is more media misinformation about schizophrenia than about any other type of mental health problem.

1. A diagnosis of schizophrenia does not mean 'split personality,' or indicate that someone will be calm one minute and then be 'out of control' the next.
2. Sensational stories in the media tend to present people with schizophrenia as dangerous, even though most people diagnosed with schizophrenia don't commit violent crimes.
3. Another misconception is that people who hear voices are dangerous, but actually voices are more likely to suggest that you harm yourself than someone else and people have a choice in whether they do what the voices say.

## Getting help

If you, or someone you care for, are experiencing the symptoms of schizophrenia you may wish to contact your GP who can prescribe drug treatments and refer you for psychiatric help. You may also be referred to social services and the local community mental health team who can support you at home.

## Support us

We must ensure that people with a diagnosis of schizophrenia have full access to a range of treatment and support to manage their illness and to help them recover. Whether you make a single or regular donation, leave a gift in your Will, or set up a tribute fund you will be making a greatly appreciated contribution to continue our vital work.

[mentalhealth.org.uk/donate](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/donate)