



the portage path behavioral health reference guide to: **Schizophrenia**

Schizophrenia is defined as a group of psychotic disorders characterized by disturbances in thought, perception, affect, behavior, and communication that last longer than a six month time period. Schizophrenia is a severe medical illness that effects more than 2 million Americans each year, and annually costs the United States over 3.2 billion dollars. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) describes schizophrenia as a devastating mental illness - the most chronic and disabling of the severe mental disorders. Schizophrenia is a terrifying brain disease that can effect anyone at any age, but usually effects men in their late teens to early twenties, and women in their twenties to early thirties. The severity of this disease has led mental health professionals to nick name schizophrenia as “Youth’s Greatest Disabler”, because the ages in which the disease is usually acquired is between 6 - 25.

It is important to be able to recognize the early warning signs of schizophrenia in order to avoid any permanent psychological, physical, or emotional damage. The Treatment Advocacy Center reports that several large scale schizophrenic studies suggest early intervention may forestall the worst long-term outcomes of this devastating brain disorder. Noticeable social withdraw, deterioration of personal hygiene, depression, irrational statements, and unexpected hostility are just a few of the basic early warning signs close friends and families should be able to recognize and report to medical professionals.

Signs & Symptoms

- Hallucinations
- Illusions
- Social Withdrawal
- Disordered Thinking
- Shift in basic personality
- Distorted perceptions of reality
- Delusions - “Paranoid” and “Broadcasting”
- Reduction in emotional expression
- Disorganized and incomprehensible speech pattern
- Change in emotions, speech and behavior
- Believe that other people are controlling and reading their mind
- Inability to separate real from unreal experiences
- Deterioration of social relationships

Schizophrenia has the ability to affect the way a person thinks, manages emotions, makes decisions and relates to others, which in turn affects careers, relationships, and social lifestyles. The hallucinations, illusions, and other distorted perceptions of reality are just a few symptoms a person with schizophrenia might have trouble dealing with. To control these symptoms antipsychotic medication is prescribed and known to be the best treatment now available for schizophrenia. In most cases people with schizophrenia must take part in a rehabilitation program after an acute psychotic episode. These programs provide social, residential, and recreational training, along with vocational opportunities that are tailor made for a person suffering with this cruel disease.

The cause for schizophrenia is not yet known, but researchers have reason to believe that it could be caused by complications during pregnancy, genetic disposition, and brain chemistry. Prevention techniques, possible treatments, and possible causes of this disease are all currently being researched by mental health professionals.



Schizophrenia and Substance Abuse

In an attempt to self medicate, most people with schizophrenia find it easier to cope with what they are experiencing by believing they have a drug or alcohol problem, rather than a harsh mental disorder, like schizophrenia. Dr. Harry Hustig, author of *Managing Schizophrenia in the Community* reports that 72 percent of patients with schizophrenia used drugs to get high, an equal amount used them to avoid depression, and 15 percent used drugs to reduce side effects. Mental health professionals believe that alcohol and drugs do not cause schizophrenia, but have been known to create symptoms that are similar to those of schizophrenia and negatively effect the medication that is used for treatment.

The drug most likely to be used by a schizophrenic person is nicotine. Nicotine reduces the effectiveness of the antipsychotic medication prescribed. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that several studies have found that schizophrenic people who smoke to need higher doses of antipsychotic medication. Smoking cessation is extremely difficult for schizophrenic people because the symptoms of nicotine withdraw have been known to worsen the already unrelenting symptoms of schizophrenia.



What Treatments Are Available For Schizophrenia?

To rule out any other causes or illnesses responsible for the symptoms being experienced, it is important to have a physical examination, laboratory tests, and personal medical history reviewed by a health professional. While there is no cure for schizophrenia, it is known to be a very treatable disease. Antipsychotic medications are currently the best form of treatment for schizophrenia. Antipsychotic drugs are used to reduce the psychotic symptoms and allow a patient to function more effectively and appropriately. Once the medication is taken on a regular basis and the psychotic symptoms have been reduced, many schizophrenic people feel the need to seek individual psychotherapy. Talking to a mental health professional helps a schizophrenic person deal with experiences, thoughts, feelings, emotions, and past and present problems.

The side effects of antipsychotic medications are rare, but if side effects are experienced they usually include one or more of the following: dry mouth, constipation, blurred vision, and drowsiness. Tardive Dyskinesia, is a antipsychotic side effect that is experienced by 15-20 percent of those who have taken older antipsychotic medications for a long period of time. This condition involves involuntary facial movements, and the jerking or twisting of other body parts.

Self-help groups for people and families that are affected by schizophrenia are becoming more and more popular. The National Institute of Mental Health states, "Although not led by a professional therapist, these groups may be therapeutic because members provide continuing mutual support as well as comfort in knowing that they are not alone in the problems they face."

If you have identified with the issues discussed in this flyer and you're ready to take the next step toward feeling better, visit our web site or call Portage Path and find out how we can help:

Web Site	www.portagepath.org
Appointments	330-253-3100 800-828-4508

If you feel you're in emotional crisis and you need someone to talk to, call our free 24-hour, 7-day crisis hotline:

Support Hotline	330-434-9144 888-434-8878
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