

Schizophrenia

Signs and Symptoms

Schizophrenia is a mental illness that usually strikes in late adolescence or early adulthood, but can strike at any time in life. The signs and symptoms vary from individual to individual, but all people with the disorder show one or more of the following symptoms:

1. **Delusions:** These are beliefs that are not true, such as feeling people are following or trying to hurt them, believing other people can read their minds, or beliefs that they have special powers or abilities.
2. **Hallucinations:** This usually takes the form of hearing voices that are not there, but people with schizophrenia may also see, smell, taste, and feel things that are not there.
3. **Bizarre behavior:** This can be expressed in many different ways. In short, the individual behaves in ways that seem inappropriate or strange to other people.
4. **Disorganized speech:** The individual speaks in ways that are hard to understand. For instance, sentences might not make sense, or topic of conversation changes with little or no connection between sentences. Sometimes speech is completely incomprehensible.
5. **"Negative symptoms":** This includes lack of motivation or interest, diminished cognitive functioning, and decreased emotional expression. Individuals may lose interest in attending to their own personal hygiene, have little interest in interacting with others, and rarely seem to feel or express strong emotions.

In addition to these above symptoms, people with schizophrenia suffer a decline in their level of functioning; for instance, they may not be able to work at a job that requires the same level of skill or concentration as the job they held before they became ill required, or they may lose all ability to withstand the pressures of the working world. They may show a decline in their ability to attend to household chores or all the demands of raising their children, and/or they may not be able to have a full social life anymore.

Sometimes schizophrenia is a chronic condition, and the individual afflicted is constantly experiencing hallucinations or other symptoms of the disorder. Other people have periods of time when they are relatively symptom-free but have periods of more acute psychosis. Every individual is different, and every person with schizophrenia experiences the disease in a different way.