381 Church Street
PO Box 1800
Markham, ON L3P 7P3

T 905-472-7373
oakvalleyhealth.ca

Oak Valley Health

Schizophrenia

Patient education

What is schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a complex biochemical brain disorder that can affect the way you think or perceive things. It can cause you to see or hear things that aren't there, or to believe things that aren't true. Individuals with schizophrenia have difficulties in one or more areas of their lives.

What causes schizophrenia?

- Family stress
- Stressful event that has happened in your life
- Divorce
- Losing a loved one

Schizophrenia occurs when multiple inherited gene abnormalities combine with non-genetic factors which alter the brain's structure, and neurotransmitters.

There is no test for schizophrenia. Your doctor or nurse should be able to tell if you have it by learning about your symptoms and doing a comprehensive history and assessment. Your doctor might need to do tests to make sure your symptoms are not caused by a different medical problem.

What increases the risks?

- Having a family member that has schizophrenia
- Problems that may have harmed your brain development during your mother's pregnancy
- Having neurotransmitter problems
- Psychological stressors (childhood trauma)
- Environmental stressors (poverty, high crime environment, immigrant groups)
- Substance abuse
- Biological factors (genetics, family history)
- Neurobiological factors (Dopamine, Glutamate and abnormal maturation of CNS)

How do I know that I have schizophrenia?

- Hallucination
- Delusions
- Speaking in a way that is difficult to understand or does not make sense to others
- Odd behaviour
- Having overactive or underactive motor control
- Difficulty with expressing emptions
- Losing determination

Schizophrenia can cause:

- Hallucinations, they are when you hear, see, feel, smell, or taste things that aren't there. For example, people with schizophrenia often hear voices in their head telling them to do things when there isn't really anyone talking.
- Delusions – Delusions are when you believe things that are not true. For example, people with schizophrenia sometimes believe they are a famous person who is dead.
- Disorganized thinking or speech – People with schizophrenia have trouble thinking in an organized way. Sometimes, they make up words or say things that do not make any sense.

How is this treated?

- Medicines (antipsychotic or symptom reliever)
- Counselling
- Electroconvulsive therapy (severe cases when medicine and counselling do not work)
- Cognitive behaviour therapy
- Behaviour skills training
- Supportive employment
- Cognitive remediation treatments
- Combination of these therapies and antipsychotic medication
- Family education and support groups
- Medication Assessment Program (MAPS)
- Inpatient care/ Integrated rehab unit

The medicines for schizophrenia often reduce symptoms, but they take some getting used to. Sometimes people need to try a few different medicines before finding the ones that work best and cause the fewest problems.

The medicines used to treat schizophrenia can cause uncomfortable side effects. If your medicines cause side effects, tell your doctor. They might be able to lower your dose, switch you to a different medicine, or help manage the side effects in other ways.

If you have been diagnosed with schizophrenia, please contact your doctor or health care provider immediately if you are experiencing any of the following:

- You do not respond to the treatment well
- Trouble with sleep
- Feel depressed
- You are using drugs and alcohol

If you have been diagnosed with schizophrenia, please get help immediately at your local Emergency Department if you are experiencing any of the following:

- You feel out of control
- You show signs of suicide

Where can I get more information?

Schizophrenia Society of Canada: schizophrenia.ca/

Reference: Schizophrenia. (2021, June 08). Elsevier Inc: ClinicalKey for Nursing.
Retrieved from https://www.clinicalkey.com/nursing/#!/content/patient_handout/5-s2.0-pe_72525d2c-56f9-4808-b03e-632f5569468c