

SCHIZOPHRENIA

Schizophrenia is a disease of the brain characterized by disturbed thinking, strange behavior and inappropriate emotional expression. It is the most disabling of all the mental illnesses.

People who suffer from untreated schizophrenia deteriorate in personal, social, academic and occupational functioning. This illness affects people of all ages, races, and economic levels. The affected individual isolates and withdraws in an attempt to cope with symptoms that can be very frightening and bewildering. Family and friends also do not understand the unexplained change in behavior and are uncertain how to help.

The onset of schizophrenia typically occurs between the late teens and the mid-thirties, with incidents prior to adolescence being rare. The disease comes and goes in some persons that remain relatively stable. Other less fortunate individuals experience a progressive worsening of symptoms leading to severe disability.

Symptoms of schizophrenia can include:

- *A decline in occupational, social or academic functioning.
- *Apathy and increased social withdrawal.
- *Decreased attention to personal hygiene.
- *Disorganized speech and/or behavior.
- *Absence of emotional expression.
- *Delusions (false beliefs despite evidence to the contrary).
- *Hallucinations (perceptions of things that are, in fact, nonexistent) frequently in the form of hearing voices.

If you or someone you know appears to suffer from schizophrenia, call for help.

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