

What is Schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a chronic severe and disabling brain disorder. Around 1% of the population is schizophrenic. The symptoms usually start to occur between ages 16-30. The disease affects genders and ethnic groups equally, although men typically start to show signs of schizophrenia in their early twenties, while symptoms in women start to appear in their late twenties to early thirties. The most common symptoms are hearing voices that don't exist, hallucinations, delusions, believing people can control one's thoughts and speaking nonsense.

EXPLAINING INCREASED SUICIDE RATES

Schizophrenia symptoms can be categorized into 3 types. These are positive symptoms, negative symptoms, and cognitive symptoms.

Positive symptoms are also called psychotic symptoms, and people without schizophrenia do not experience these. These include hallucinations and delusions.

Negative symptoms are when a sufferer has an absence of normal traits, such as lack of interest in activities or inability to carry on a conversation.

Cognitive symptoms have to do with a person's thought process and often include poor concentration.

CAUSES OF SCHIZOPHRENIA

The cause of schizophrenia is different from person to person. In many cases it is a combination of genes and environment. Since the disease runs in families, a person whose relative is schizophrenic has an increased chance of also suffering from it. Schizophrenics have a higher rate of having genetic mutations than the general population. They also have an imbalance of the neurotransmitters dopamine and glutamine. It has been found that the ventricles are larger in the brains of schizophrenics and that they have less grey matter than non-schizophrenic people.

DIAGNOSING SCHIZOPHRENIA

To diagnose schizophrenia, a psychological evaluation is the first step. A doctor will ask the patient about symptoms and family history of mental health problems. Lab tests will also be conducted including blood and urine tests. Brain-imaging tests such as an MRI or CT scan should be done to check for abnormalities. This also ensures that a person's symptoms are not being caused by a tumor, which can sometimes mimic schizophrenic symptoms.

EFFECTS OF SCHIZOPHRENIA

Schizophrenia can be devastating. People with schizophrenia tend to isolate themselves, which leads to relationship problems. Sometimes, sufferers try to self-medicate with alcohol or drugs, but this only makes things worse. Sadly, there is also an increased suicide risk for schizophrenics. Any suicidal thoughts or actions should be tended to immediately. These are most likely to occur during a psychotic episode.

TREATMENT

The earlier schizophrenia is diagnosed, the easier it is to treat. There is a much better chance of recovery the sooner it's identified. Most treatment courses include medication and counseling. Anti-psychosis drugs have helped the schizophrenic community by allowing them to live at home rather than requiring lengthy stays in hospitals. It is very important to continue taking medications even when the symptoms are not apparent, because they are likely to come back.

For more information, visit www.EastMountainHospital.com