

UNDERSTANDING Schizophrenia

Smoking, Drugs and Alcohol Wreak Havoc

Substance use disorder is widespread among people with schizophrenia, worsening symptoms and making diagnoses more complicated. It also makes recovery more difficult because:

- People who misuse drugs and alcohol are less likely to follow their treatment plan.
- Alcohol, drugs and smoking tobacco can make anti-psychotic medications less effective.

Smoking tobacco contributes to a lower life expectancy in people with schizophrenia—a startling 20-25 years!

People with schizophrenia and substance use disorder need specialized integrated treatment to overcome both disorders.

Creating a Supportive Environment

If a loved one has symptoms of schizophrenia, talk to them about your concerns and help them find treatment.

Once diagnosed, attend family education sessions to learn how to help them day-to-day. If your loved one is 18 or older, ask to be added as a person who their physician and/or therapist can talk to about concerns, treatment and other protected information.

If your friend or loved one threatens self-harm or suicide, you should take them to the emergency room or call 911 immediately.

A close or caregiver relationship with a person diagnosed with schizophrenia can be stressful, so consider joining a support group and/or seeing a mental health professional to help you cope.

Know the Facts

Myth	Fact
A schizophrenia diagnosis means life is hopeless.	With proper treatment, most people get better over time, not worse.
Schizophrenia is very rare.	Approximately 1 out of 100 people have schizophrenia.
People with schizophrenia are violent and dangerous.	Most people with schizophrenia are not violent. If violence occurs, it's most likely to happen at home.
Most with schizophrenia are homeless or hospitalized.	The majority with schizophrenia live with family, in a group home or independently.
Schizophrenia is caused by drug and alcohol use.	Substance use doesn't cause schizophrenia, but people with schizophrenia are more likely than others to misuse drugs and alcohol.

How We Can Help

We can help people with schizophrenia manage their symptoms and regain their lives.

We begin with assessments and diagnoses, then we help people find the medications that work best for them. Pine Rest offers a complete range of psychosocial help including Dialectical Behavior Therapy, an approach that helps people change negative behavior patterns, individual counseling, group therapy and family therapy. We also provide safe and caring hospitalization when needed.

Contact Information

Our outpatient locations in Michigan and Iowa offer assessment, psychosocial help and individual, group and family therapy. Call to schedule your first appointment.

866.852.4001

Individual therapy is also available through an online video connection similar to Facetime or Skype. Visit our Website for more information and to schedule your first appointment.

pinerest.org/telehealth

If you or your loved one are in crisis, please contact our contact center, which is staffed 24/7 by licensed clinicians.

616.455.9200

800.678.5500

616.281.6446 (TTY line)



For more information about mental health topics, please visit: **pinerest.org/insights**





What is Schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a treatable disorder of the brain that changes the way people perceive the world. They may have delusions and hallucinations, say things that don't make sense, behave strangely or withdraw from society.

People with schizophrenia can find it difficult to hold a job, care for themselves or participate in daily life.

However, with the right support, most people with schizophrenia can have satisfying relationships, be part of the community and enjoy life.

When to be Concerned

Schizophrenia symptoms usually start between the ages of 16 and 30, with men typically experiencing symptoms at an earlier age than women. Symptoms may come on suddenly or build slowly.

With schizophrenia, thinking, behavior and emotions are affected by the following symptoms:

- **Delusions.** About four out of five people with schizophrenia believe things that aren't based in reality. They may feel others are out to get them, think they have exceptional abilities, worry about impending disaster or think their thoughts are being controlled by someone else.
- **Hallucinations.** Those with schizophrenia may see or hear things that don't actually exist.
- **Disorganized thinking, disorganized speech.** Because their thinking can be confused, people with schizophrenia may answer questions with unrelated information, provide a partial answer or string together words that don't make sense.



Do you know someone who can't tell the difference between what's real and what isn't? Perhaps they hear voices that no one else hears, see things that no one else sees or believe things that aren't true.

They may have schizophrenia, a serious brain disease that includes a wide range of problems in thinking, behavior and emotions.

- **Extremely disorganized or abnormal motor behavior.** Some people may find it hard to focus on tasks, complete goals or follow instructions. Others may act childlike and silly, become agitated, move excessively or assume a bizarre posture.
- **Negative symptoms (absence of normal behaviors).** A person with schizophrenia may seem apathetic, emotionless and out of energy. They may avoid eye contact, talk in a monotone and neglect personal hygiene.

Getting the Right Diagnosis

The symptoms of schizophrenia can be confused with other disorders, so getting a correct diagnosis is critical. This is best done by a psychiatrist with experience identifying and treating schizophrenia. Early diagnoses and treatment are key to better outcomes and recovery.

To complicate matters, many people with schizophrenia resist going to the doctor because they don't believe they need help. And symptoms can mimic typical teen behaviors, making it hard for parents to know what's normal and what's not.

Scientists aren't sure what causes schizophrenia, but people who have a parent or sibling with the disease are more susceptible. There may be a link to brain structure or chemistry, as well as environmental factors including viruses and pre-natal nutrition.

Finding Treatment, Moving Toward Recovery

Being diagnosed with schizophrenia can feel devastating, but there is hope. With the right treatment and a strong support system, most people improve over time.

To relieve symptoms and prevent psychotic episodes, treatment includes:

- **Anti-psychotic medications.** There are many choices, and it may take a few tries to find which medicine works best, and with the fewest side effects for each patient. Medications must be taken daily—stopping suddenly can be very dangerous and make symptoms worse.
- **Psychosocial (psychological and social) help.** Rehabilitation, individual psychotherapy, family education and self-help groups can assist people in managing symptoms, learning social skills, coping with stress and avoiding relapse.
- **Healthy lifestyle choices.** Obesity is common among people with schizophrenia, and many develop hypertension, diabetes and heart disease. Eating right and exercising can improve overall health.

With the right help, some people are able to eliminate all of their symptoms and function normally again.