

SCHIZOPHRENIA & SCHIZOAFFECTIVE Disorder



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SCHIZOPHRENIA

Schizophrenia is a serious mental illness that interferes with a person's ability to think clearly, manage emotions, make decisions and relate to others. It is a complex, long-term medical illness. Although schizophrenia can occur at any age, the average age of onset tends to be in the late teens to the early 20s for men, and the late 20s to early 30s for women. It is uncommon for schizophrenia to be diagnosed in a person younger than 12 or older than 40. It is possible to live well with schizophrenia.

SYMPTOMS

For a diagnosis of schizophrenia, some of the following symptoms are present in the context of reduced functioning for a least 6 months:

Hallucinations. These include a person hearing voices, seeing things, or smelling things others can't perceive. The hallucination is very real to the person experiencing it, and it may be very confusing for a loved one to witness. The voices in the hallucination can be critical or threatening. Voices may involve people that are known or unknown to the person hearing them.

Delusions. These are false beliefs that don't change even when the person who holds them is presented with new ideas or facts. People who have delusions often also have problems concentrating, confused thinking, or the sense that their thoughts are blocked.

Negative symptoms are ones that diminish a person's abilities. Negative symptoms often include being emotionally flat or speaking in a dull, disconnected way. People with the negative symptoms may be unable to start or follow through with activities, show little interest in life, or sustain relationships. Negative symptoms are sometimes confused with clinical depression.

Cognitive issues/disorganised thinking. People with the cognitive symptoms of schizophrenia often struggle to remember things, organise their thoughts or complete tasks. Commonly, people with schizophrenia have anosognosia or "lack of insight." This means the person is unaware that he has the illness, which can make treating or working with him much more challenging.

SCHIZOAFFECTIVE DISORDER

Schizoaffective disorder is a chronic mental health condition characterised primarily by symptoms of schizophrenia, such as hallucinations or delusions, and symptoms of a mood disorder, such as mania and depression.

SYMPTOMS

Schizoaffective disorder can be difficult to diagnose because it has **symptoms of both schizophrenia and either depression or bipolar disorder**. There are two major types of schizoaffective disorder: **bipolar type and depressive type**. To be diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder a person must have the following symptoms.

- A period during which there is a major mood disorder, either depression or mania, that occurs at the same time that symptoms of schizophrenia are present.
- Delusions or hallucinations for two or more weeks in the absence of a major mood episode.
- Symptoms that meet criteria for a major mood episode are present for the majority of the total duration of the illness.
- The abuse of drugs or a medication are not responsible for the symptoms.

The symptoms of schizoaffective disorder can be severe and need to be monitored closely. Depending on the type of mood disorder diagnosed, depression or bipolar disorder, people will experience different symptoms:

- Hallucinations - seeing or hearing things that aren't there.
- Delusions - false, fixed beliefs that are held regardless of contradictory evidence.
- Disorganized thinking - A person may switch very quickly from one topic to another or provide answers that are completely unrelated.
- **Depressed mood.** If a person has been diagnosed with **schizoaffective disorder depressive type** they will experience feelings of sadness, emptiness, feelings of worthlessness or other symptoms of depression.
- **Manic behavior.** If a person has been diagnosed with **schizoaffective disorder bipolar type** they will experience feelings of euphoria, racing thoughts, increased risky behavior and other symptoms of mania.