

Early Onset Schizophrenia



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Those with schizophrenia can hear, see, or smell things that are not there (this is known as hallucinating). They may have delusions, which is believing things that are not true. About 1% of American have schizophrenia. It is a complicated, long-term medical illness. Most people diagnosed with schizophrenia are teenagers or young adults, however in more rare circumstances people can be diagnosed before the age of 13.

What are the symptoms?

There are many different signs of schizophrenia. Each person (whether child or adult) diagnosed with schizophrenia will experience their symptoms differently. Some of these signs can include:

- Seeing or hearing things that are not there (which is called hallucinations)
- Having beliefs that are not true
- Having a hard time thinking clearly or organizing thoughts
- Memory loss
- Do not believe that they have an illness (this is known as anosognosia)
- Does not express a lot of emotion
- Speaking in a dull way
- Changes in friend group, or isolating from friends
- Drop in grades
- Difficulty sleeping

To be diagnosed, a person must experience at least 2 of the above symptoms for 6 months as well as having difficulties functioning with self-care and at home or school.

Difficulties diagnosing schizophrenia in youth

Diagnosing schizophrenia is not easy. Many people with schizophrenia do not believe that they have it. This can make getting treatment very difficult.

It can be very hard to diagnose children and adolescents. Many of the first signs of schizophrenia (such as difficulty sleeping and irritability) can be common in teens or difficult to notice right away. It is very important that children or adolescence work with health professionals to find a

Diagnosis

Hallucinations or delusions in a child should lead to an evaluation by a mental health professional who has experience working with children and adolescents with mental health disorders. A diagnosis of schizophrenia is made through an interview with the child and their parents/guardians as well as conversations with educators who work with the child.

Treatment

There is no cure for schizophrenia. Recovery while living with schizophrenia is often seen over time and means a combination of treatments. Those with schizophrenia should talk with their doctor to find treatment options that are best for them. Treatment options include:

- **Medications**, known as antipsychotics. Many of these medications can have severe side effects for children and adolescence. These can include weight gain, or drowsiness.
- **Psychotherapy**, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) or cognitive enhancement therapy (CET).
- **Psychosocial Treatments**, such as assertive community treatment (ACT) which provides individual services and daily professional support, as well as peer support groups and family support. This also includes activities to help youth and adolescence develop social skills.
- **Complementary Health Approaches**, such as acupuncture, meditation, and changes in diet.
- **Family education**, such as family therapy and educational classes.

Children and adolescents with schizophrenia often need additional support in school. This can include smaller classroom sizes, individual support, or changes to homework.