



Official reprint from UpToDate®

[www.uptodate.com](http://www.uptodate.com) ©2018 UpToDate, Inc. and/or its affiliates. All Rights Reserved.

## Patient education: Schizophrenia (The Basics)

[Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate](#)

**What is schizophrenia?** — Schizophrenia is a brain disorder that keeps you from thinking clearly. It can cause you to see or hear things that aren't there, or to believe things that aren't true.

**What are the symptoms of schizophrenia?** — Schizophrenia can cause:

- **Positive symptoms** – In this case, "positive" does not mean "good." Positive symptoms are **abnormal experiences or behaviors that start** because of schizophrenia. Examples of positive symptoms include:
  - Hallucinations – Hallucinations are when you hear, see, feel, smell, or taste things that aren't there. For example, people with schizophrenia often hear voices in their head telling them to do things when there isn't really anyone talking.
  - Delusions – Delusions are when you believe things that are not true. For example, people with schizophrenia sometimes believe they are a famous person who is dead.
  - Disorganized thinking or speech – People with schizophrenia have trouble thinking in an organized way. They can talk and talk about a lot of things before getting to the point. Sometimes they make up words or say things that do not make any sense.
- **Negative symptoms** – In this case, "negative" does not mean "bad." Negative symptoms are **normal behaviors that stop** because of schizophrenia. Examples of negative symptoms include:
  - Not showing much emotion and not changing your facial expression
  - Not moving or talking much
  - Not taking showers or keeping clean
  - Not having much interest in spending time with people or having fun
- **Cognitive symptoms** – Cognitive symptoms are symptoms that affect your ability to think clearly. People with schizophrenia have trouble:
  - Learning and remembering
  - Understanding speech or other forms of communication
  - Making sense of new information
  - Solving problems
- **Emotional symptoms** – People with schizophrenia often also have symptoms of anxiety or depression.

**Is there a test for schizophrenia?** — No. There is no test. But your doctor or nurse should be able to tell if you have it by learning about your symptoms and doing an exam. Your doctor might need to do tests to make sure

your symptoms are not caused by a different medical problem.

**How is schizophrenia treated?** — Schizophrenia is treated with medicines that help control symptoms and with different types of counseling and support.

The medicines for schizophrenia often reduce symptoms, but they take some getting used to. Sometimes people need to try a few different medicines before finding the ones that work best and cause the fewest problems.

The medicines used to treat schizophrenia can cause uncomfortable side effects. If your medicines cause side effects, talk to your doctor about them. He or she might be able to lower your dose, switch you to a different medicine, or help manage the side effects in other ways.

To keep schizophrenia under control, you usually must take medicines for the rest of your life. It's important to take them exactly as directed. Otherwise, your symptoms could get worse.

It can also be useful for you and your family to take part in a type of therapy called "family psychoeducation." This program can teach you and your loved ones some important concepts and skills, such as:

- That schizophrenia is a biological illness and not anyone's fault
- Ways to keep your condition from getting worse
- Ways to deal with your symptoms so that they are less stressful

**What if I want to get pregnant?** — If you want to get pregnant, talk to your doctor before you start trying to get pregnant. Most women with schizophrenia need to keep taking medicines before and during pregnancy. But some women need to switch to medicines that are less likely to cause problems for the baby.

You might be tempted to go off medicines to protect your baby. But be aware that doing that could actually do more harm than good. Women who stop their medicines before or during pregnancy often get severe schizophrenia symptoms and end up needing more medicines than they would have if they had stayed on medicines in the first place.

### More on this topic

[Patient education: Quitting smoking \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Tardive dyskinesia \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Quitting smoking \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

All topics are updated as new evidence becomes available and our [peer review process](#) is complete.

**This topic retrieved from UpToDate on:** Oct 09, 2018.

The content on the UpToDate website is not intended nor recommended as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your own physician or other qualified health care professional regarding any medical questions or conditions. The use of UpToDate content is governed by the [UpToDate Terms of Use](#). ©2018 UpToDate, Inc. All rights reserved.

Topic 16445 Version 5.0