



# ARC Young Adult Mental Health Information Series

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## Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a serious mental illness that affects how a person thinks, feels and behaves. The symptoms of schizophrenia can make it difficult to participate in usual, everyday activities, but effective treatments are available. Many people who receive treatment can engage in school or work, achieve independence, and enjoy personal relationships. Schizophrenia does not increase the risk that a person will commit violent crimes. People with schizophrenia are usually diagnosed between the ages of 16 and 30, after the first episode of psychosis.



### Symptoms

#### Psychotic Symptoms

- **Hallucinations:** When a person sees, hears, smells, tastes or feels things that are not actually there
- **Delusions:** When a person has strong beliefs that are not true and may seem irrational to others.
- **Thought disorder:** When a person has ways of thinking that are unusual or illogical.
- **Movement disorder:** When a person exhibits abnormal body movements.

#### Negative Symptoms

Loss of motivation, loss of interest or enjoyment in daily activities, withdrawal from social life, difficulty showing emotions, and difficulty functioning normally. These symptoms are sometimes mistaken for symptoms of depression or other mental illnesses.

#### Cognitive symptoms

Problems in attention, concentration, and memory.

- Having trouble processing information to make decisions.
- Having trouble using information immediately after learning it.
- Having trouble focusing or paying attention.

Teens may experience different symptoms when compared to an adult such as:

- Being less likely to have delusions.
- Being more likely to have visual hallucinations.





## Risk Factors

- Genetics: Schizophrenia sometimes runs in families. However, just because one family member has schizophrenia, it does not mean that other members of the family also will have it.
- Environment: Factors that may increase the chance of developing schizophrenia include living in poverty, stressful or dangerous surroundings, and exposure to viruses or nutritional problems before birth.
- Brain structure and function: Research shows that people with schizophrenia may be more likely to have differences in the size of certain brain areas and in connections between brain areas. Some of these brain differences may develop before birth.
- Substance use at an early age: Cannabis use increases the risk of developing schizophrenia in youth and of triggering an earlier onset of the illness in people who are genetically vulnerable.

## Treatment

Schizophrenia requires lifelong treatment, even when symptoms have subsided. Medications are the cornerstone of schizophrenia treatment with anti-psychotic medications being the most commonly prescribed drugs. The goal of treatment with anti-psychotic medications is to effectively manage signs and symptoms at the lowest possible dose. Psychosocial therapy is the complementary treatment to medications. These include:

- Individual therapy can be used to normalize thought patterns. Learning to cope with stress and identify early warning signs of relapse can help people with schizophrenia manage their illness.
- Social skills training focuses on improving communication and social interactions and improving the ability to participate in daily activities.
- Family therapy provides support and education to families dealing with schizophrenia.
- Vocational rehabilitation and supported employment focuses on helping people with schizophrenia prepare for, find and keep jobs.

## Resources available

D'un couvert à l'autre - A welcome centre that serves the needs of people with schizophrenia or other illnesses with psychotic features. The centre offers employment support, food aid and self-directed activities – 1301 Ste-Helene St., Longueuil, QC J4K 3S4. (450) 928-9898

Éclusier du Haut-Richelieu Provides support for friend and families of those suffering from schizophrenia and other mental health issues – 144 Jacques-Cartier St. N., Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, QC J3B 6S6, (450) 346-5252, [www.eclusierhr.ca](http://www.eclusierhr.ca)

Psychosocial support available at your local CLSC and through your primary care physician.

CLSC St-Hubert (450) 443-7400

CLSC Brossard (450) 445-4452

CLSC St-Jean-sur-Richelieu (450) 358-2572

CLSC Richelieu (450) 658-7561

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