

THE FUTURE...with schizophrenia

Treatment choices

As with any illness, it is important that you understand the specific ways that your illness affects you. There are many treatment choices to make and it is important to be as well informed as possible regarding treatment option. You can collaborate with health care providers and others to choose the programs that will be best for your recovery.

There are also many consumer/survivor organizations throughout the country. These organizations can be very helpful in providing support, information and friendship.

Course and outcome

Schizophrenia takes tremendous toll, both on the people with the illness and on their families. However, today there is reason to be optimistic. Major technical advances have contributed greatly to how we understand the biology of schizophrenia and its treatment.

It is true that many people suffer from intense and long-lasting symptoms of schizophrenia, but the disease does not always progress to a deteriorated state. Although no present treatment approach can prevent or cure schizophrenia, some have had remarkable effects on the course of the illness. With the arrival of new medication options, many people have experienced greater symptom control, so that rehabilitation is possible.

Work and study

Some people recover fully, return to their jobs or finish school; other find they cannot cope with their jobs or studies after an active phase of schizophrenia. If you want to work but wonder if you can cope, find out about programs in vocational rehabilitation. Such programs are a chance to rebuild work skills and self-confidence, and to identify occupations that suit your changed circumstances. Full-time, paid work is not the only option. Many people with schizophrenia are able to improve the quality of their lives even if they are not employed.

Having children

The possibility of someone in the general population having schizophrenia is about one in 100. If one parent has schizophrenia the chance is about one in 10; if both parents have schizophrenia the chances are 4 in 10. Raising children can be stressful for anyone. This is often particularly true for people with schizophrenia. These factors need to be seriously considered before planning a pregnancy. If you are thinking about having children, you should discuss the matter thoroughly with your partner and your doctor.

Family involvement in treatment

Families can help people with schizophrenia recover and stay well. It is usually a good idea for partners and family members to meet doctors and/or other health care providers to learn about and discuss the illness. They may be asked to discuss what the person with schizophrenia was like before the prodromal phase of illness, to ensure accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment.

Families are often troubled by changes in the behaviour of people with schizophrenia during the active phase of illness. Most families want to help, especially if their concerns are understood and discussed with the person with schizophrenia and his or her treatment team. If people with schizophrenia need help to care for themselves and organize their lives, their partners or relatives may need to step in to guide and protect them. The struggle to find the right balance between being dependent and being independent may be upsetting both to people with schizophrenia need to be patient with themselves and with their families, and work at ways to get along. Sometimes a family therapist can help.

Staying well

People with schizophrenia and their families should discuss ways to keep symptoms under control and to live a full life.

It is also important to take the following steps:

- Learn about schizophrenia and its treatment; ask the doctors or therapists about any aspects you do not understand.
- Arrange medical follow-up and stay on prescribed medication long enough to prevent a relapse.
- Get help to cope with everyday situations by talking with a therapist or by going to a rehabilitation program.
- Contact your doctor or therapist immediately if symptoms return or get worse.
- Learn to cope with stress by gradually increasing the amount you can handle until you are living close to your potential. Determine how much stress is too much and when it is necessary to draw back. Finding the correct balance is difficult, but it can be learned.
- Have at least one person to rely on and confide in. It may help if you stay in touch with family members and/or join self-help groups, religious organizations or consumer groups.
- Develop a well-balanced lifestyle that includes regular exercise, rest, healthy meals, as well as time for friends, family and fun. If you are married and you have schizophrenia, you should assume as much responsibility for your family and fun. If you are married and you have schizophrenia, you should assume as much responsibility for your family as you can. If you are able, you should work or become involved in activities such as social rehabilitation programs.