

Further help

First Response Service

If you or a loved one is in mental health crisis, you can call our 24-hour First Response Service on **111 (option 2)**. This service is for anyone, of any age, living in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Specially-trained mental health staff will speak to you and discuss with you your mental health care needs

Rethink

www.rethink.org/schizophrenia

Urgent Care Cambridgeshire

Dial 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Schizophrenia/Pages/Introduction.aspx

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Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any concerns about any of CPFT's services, or would like more information please contact: Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on freephone 0800 376 0775 or e-mail pals@cpft.nhs.uk

Out-of-hours' service for CPFT service users

Please call **NHS 111** for health advice and support.

If you require this information in another format such as braille, large print or another language, please let us know.

HQ Elizabeth House, Fulbourn Hospital, Cambridge CB21 5EF.
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www.cpft.nhs.uk



Insight into schizophrenia

May 2018



What is schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a mental illness that affects about one in 100 people at some point in their life. A number of different parts of the mind can be affected: perceiving, thinking, emotions and beliefs. The impact of this is usually great, affecting nearly every aspect of a person's and their family's life.

The term schizophrenia is often misunderstood. It is not the case that people diagnosed with schizophrenia have a 'split personality', although the illness can seem to affect the person's character. Most people with schizophrenia are not dangerous or aggressive.

What causes schizophrenia?

A single cause for schizophrenia has not been identified and causes differ from person to person. There is no definitive test for it and professionals make a diagnosis from what person describes or what is observed. It is thought that there are both biological and psychological factors that interact to make a person vulnerable to schizophrenia. The risk of developing it is greater if you have a parent, brother or sister with schizophrenia.

It may be triggered by stressful life events or excessive alcohol or drug use. However, in some people there is no obvious trigger. Medication that acts on chemicals in the brain can alleviate symptoms of schizophrenia, which suggests there is some disturbance of these chemicals. This leaflet provides an introduction to schizophrenia and directs you to sources of information and support.

What are the signs?

Schizophrenia can affect people in many ways, psychologically, emotionally and physically. Early signs may be a person showing changes in their thinking, isolating himself or herself, odd behaviour or appearing depressed or distressed. The signs can be divided into positive and negative symptoms. Positive symptoms are those that reflect the more psychotic experiences, where a person has difficulty in determining what is real and what is not. Positive symptoms often cause considerable distress. Negative symptoms reflect more passive reactions.

Some common symptoms are highlighted below:

Hearing voices (auditory hallucinations)
Experiences that people cannot witness (other hallucinations)
Unusual beliefs (delusions)
Incoherent speech (thought disorder)
Social withdrawal
Loss of interest and poor self care
Lack of motivation
Emotional flatness

Not everyone has all these symptoms. The pattern of the illness and its outcomes are different for different people. If you experience some symptoms for more than a short period of time you, your family or friends may find that support from others is helpful.

What next?

Self-help

Whether or not you are receiving medical treatment there are ways you can help yourself. You may find it helpful to:

- Talk to other people
- Gather information about schizophrenia
- Find out about local support groups

Medical treatment

If you, your friends or relatives believe you are experiencing signs of schizophrenia it is advisable to make an appointment with your doctor. You may then be referred to a psychiatrist so that your difficulties can be properly assessed. The psychiatrist will be interested to hear about your experiences to assess and diagnose the problem. The most common treatment following a diagnosis of schizophrenia is antipsychotic medication. If you have any questions or concerns about medication it is important that you discuss these with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Psychosocial therapies

Psychosocial therapies involve talking, listening and doing. Professionals are trained to listen without judging you. Some aim to help you understand and manage your illness and help you to become more aware of your own illness pattern. Others may work with you on lessening the impact of distressing symptoms. Occupational therapies can support you to understand and manage your illness in a practice, activity-based way. There are recognised benefits to psycho-social therapies provided that their nature and timing is tailored to your needs.