A Guide for Patients

Living With Schizophrenia

Most people out there do not understand what schizophrenia is. But the reality is that schizophrenia is a lifelong medical condition that affects approximately 1 out of 100 adults in the United States.
Feeling well means different things to different people.

Here are some things that may help people with mental illness feel better. Some of these may help you too.

- Eating healthy
- Drinking plenty of water
- Exercising
- Being active with friends and loved ones
- Getting enough sleep and rest
- Doing things you enjoy, for example playing music, watching TV, or reading
- Writing in a journal
- Taking your medications as prescribed
- Going to work if it’s a workday
- Asking yourself, “How am I doing physically, emotionally, spiritually?”

Schizophrenia Is Nobody’s Fault

Schizophrenia affects the brain. This can change how people think, feel, act, and live. It’s important to remember that no one chooses to have schizophrenia or its symptoms.

Living with schizophrenia can be hard—for you and the people around you. It can affect many parts of your life. Sometimes you might feel confused, and it may be hard to think clearly. Sometimes caring for yourself can be difficult. Even doing simple things might seem hard.

Schizophrenia can be managed, but it does not go away. With the help of your treatment team, family, friends, and medicine, you can feel better. Don’t forget—you are an important part of your treatment team too.

Being Well

Knowing how you think, feel, and act when you are well is important. If you know what you feel like when you are well, you may be better able to identify the changes that show signs of relapse. A relapse is when your symptoms get worse after you have been feeling well for some time.
Ways to Help Manage Your Illness

For many people, working with their treatment team can help them better understand and adjust to living with schizophrenia.

This includes understanding:

- Basic facts and symptoms of schizophrenia
- Treatment options
- Side effects of treatment and ways to cope with side effects
- Early warning signs of relapse
- How to respond to or manage relapse

There are many different things you can do to help you feel better. In addition to medicine and talk therapy, here are some helpful ideas.

Manage Stress

Stress may bring on symptoms of schizophrenia in some people. Examples of possible stress events are losing a loved one, leaving home, or having other difficulties in one’s finances or living situation. Schizophrenia symptoms can also occur without stress events, but by learning how to cope with stressful situations, you may be able to help manage your symptoms.

Talk with your treatment team about things you can do to help manage stress.
Be Aware of Other Health Issues

People with schizophrenia sometimes have other medical or psychiatric conditions too. Other health problems that people with schizophrenia may have include:

- Depression
- Smoking and health problems caused by it
- Drug and alcohol problems
- Being overweight or having diabetes (these may also be side effects of medications)

Depression

It is common for people with schizophrenia to have symptoms of depression. Sometimes it may be difficult to know if you are depressed or experiencing a symptom of schizophrenia. It is very important to talk to your treatment team about any symptoms you are feeling.

Substance abuse

Many people with schizophrenia also drink too much alcohol or take illegal drugs. Alcohol and drugs may keep your medicine from working well. Some drugs may actually make your symptoms worse. Here are some things you should know:

- People who abuse drugs are less likely to follow their treatment plan
- Using alcohol and drugs may cause your medications to be less effective or may increase side effects
- Stop smoking—it can be dangerous to your health

If drugs or alcohol is a concern for you, talk to your treatment team right away. They can help you find healthy ways to cope.
Take Care of Your Physical Health
Many people living with schizophrenia do not get regular medical care. It is important to take care of both your mental and physical health.

Eating Healthy
Eating healthy foods is important. It can help keep you strong and support your body.

Staying Active
Staying active can also help you control your weight. Exercise can also help people feel better.

Become Involved
Keep busy with activities you enjoy, like a hobby or volunteer work. But remember, maintain a healthy balance!

Complementary and Alternative Medicine
Other activities that are not part of standard care may also help you stay well. These include acupuncture, meditation, and other alternative approaches. Although these practices have not been studied as much as conventional “Western” medicine, they may be helpful to your personal well-being.

There is lots of information to help you better manage your health. Talk to your treatment team about what will be best for you!
There Is Hope

Schizophrenia is a lifelong illness. Remember that long-term help is needed to stay well and reduce your risk of relapse. This includes taking your medicine and developing a plan, even if you have been feeling well for a long time.

Remember that setbacks and relapses can happen to anyone. Take it one step at a time, one day at a time. You are not alone. Your family, friends, and treatment team can help!

Questions? Concerns?

Never hesitate to ask. You have a right to know everything about your health and your care.

If you have any questions or concerns about your condition or your care, ask your doctor or member of your treatment team right away. They are there to help you.