

Schizophrenia Treatment and Self-Help

Schizophrenia recovery is possible. These treatment and self-help tips can help you to manage symptoms, live and work independently, build satisfying relationships, and enjoy a rewarding life.



Schizophrenia: New hope for recovery

Getting a diagnosis of schizophrenia can be devastating. You may be struggling to think clearly, manage your emotions, relate to other people, or even function normally. But having schizophrenia doesn't mean you can't live a full and meaningful life. Despite the widespread misconception that people with schizophrenia have no chance of recovery or improvement, the reality is much more hopeful. Although currently there is no cure for schizophrenia, you can treat and manage it with medication, self-help strategies, and supportive therapies.

Since schizophrenia is often episodic, periods of remission from the severest symptoms often provide a good opportunity to start employing self-help strategies that may help to limit the length and frequency of future episodes. A diagnosis of schizophrenia is not a life-sentence of ever-worsening symptoms and hospitalizations. In fact, you have more control over your recovery than you probably realize.

The majority of people with schizophrenia get better over time, not worse. For every five people who develop schizophrenia:

- One will get better within five years of experiencing their first symptoms.
- Three will get better, but will still have times when their symptoms get worse.
- One will continue to have troublesome symptoms.

What does schizophrenia recovery mean?

Coping with schizophrenia is a lifelong process. Recovery doesn't mean you won't experience any more challenges from the illness or that you'll always be symptom-free. What it does mean is that you are learning to manage your symptoms, developing the support you need, and creating a satisfying, purpose-driven life.

A schizophrenia treatment plan that combines medication with self-help, supportive services, and therapy is the most effective approach.

Encouraging facts about schizophrenia

- **Schizophrenia is treatable.** Currently, there is no cure for schizophrenia, but the illness can be successfully treated and managed. The key is to have a strong support system in place and get the right treatment and self-help for your needs.
- **You can enjoy a fulfilling, meaningful life.** With the right treatment, most people with schizophrenia are able to have satisfying relationships, work or pursue other meaningful activities, be part of their community, and enjoy life.
- **Just because you have schizophrenia doesn't mean you'll have to be hospitalized.** If you're getting the right treatment and sticking to it, you are much less likely to experience a crisis situation that requires hospitalization.
- **Most people with schizophrenia improve.** Many people with schizophrenia regain normal functioning and even become symptom-free. No matter what challenges you presently face, there is always hope.

Tip 1: Get involved in treatment and self-help

The earlier you catch schizophrenia and begin treatment with an experienced mental health professional, the better your chances of getting and staying well. So, if you suspect you or a loved one is exhibiting [schizophrenia symptoms](#), seek help right away.

Successful schizophrenia treatment depends on a combination of factors. Medication alone is not enough. It's important to also educate yourself about the illness, communicate with your doctors and therapists, build a strong support system, take self-help measures, and stick to your treatment plan. Pursuing self-help strategies such as changing your diet, relieving stress, and seeking social support may not seem like effective tools to manage such a challenging disorder as schizophrenia, but they can have a profound effect on the frequency and severity of symptoms, improve the way you feel, and increase your self-esteem. And the more you help yourself, the less hopeless and helpless you'll feel, and the more likely your doctor will be able to reduce your medication.

While schizophrenia treatment should be individualized to your specific needs, you should always have a voice in the treatment process and your needs and concerns should be respected. Treatment works best when you, your family, and your medical team all work together.

Your attitude towards schizophrenia treatment matters

Accept your diagnosis. As upsetting as a diagnosis of schizophrenia can be, resolving to take a proactive role in treatment and self-help is crucial to your recovery. That means making healthy lifestyle changes, taking prescribed medications, and attending medical and therapy appointments.

Don't buy into the stigma of schizophrenia. Many fears about schizophrenia are not based on reality. Take your illness seriously but don't buy into the myth that you can't improve. Associate with people who see beyond your diagnosis, to the person you really are.

Communicate with your doctor. Help your doctor ensure you're getting the right type and dose of medication. Be honest and upfront about side effects, concerns, and other treatment issues.

Pursue self-help and therapy that helps you manage symptoms. Don't rely on medication alone. Self-help strategies can help you to manage symptoms and regain a sense of control over your health and well-being. Supportive therapy can teach you how to

challenge delusional beliefs, ignore voices in your head, protect against relapse, and motivate yourself to persevere with treatment and self-help.

Set and work toward life goals. Having schizophrenia doesn't mean you can't work, have relationships, or experience a fulfilling life. Set meaningful life goals for yourself beyond your illness.

Getting a diagnosis

The first step to schizophrenia treatment is getting a correct diagnosis. This isn't always easy, since the symptoms of schizophrenia can resemble those caused by other mental and physical health problems. Furthermore, people with schizophrenia may believe nothing is wrong and resist going to the doctor.

Because of these issues, it is best to see a psychiatrist with experience identifying and treating schizophrenia, rather than a family doctor.

Tip 2: Get active

As well as providing all the [emotional and physical benefits](#), regular exercise can even help to manage symptoms of schizophrenia. Unless you're experiencing a psychotic episode, getting physically active is something you can do right now to improve your focus, relieve stress, give you more energy, help you sleep, and make you feel calmer.

You don't have to become a fitness fanatic or join a gym, but rather, find a physical activity you enjoy and aim for 30 minutes of movement on most days. If it's easier, three 10-minute sessions can be just as effective. Rhythmic exercise that engages both your arms and legs, such as walking, running, swimming, or dancing, can be especially effective at calming your nervous system. Instead of focusing on your thoughts, try to focus on how your body feels as you move—how your feet hit the ground, for example, the rhythm of your breathing, or the feeling of the wind on your skin.

Tip 3: Seek face-to-face support

Connecting face-to-face with others is the most effective way to calm your nervous system and relieve stress. Since stress can trigger psychosis and make the symptoms of schizophrenia worse, keeping it under control is extremely important. Find someone you can

connect with face to face on a regular basis—someone you can talk to for an uninterrupted period of time who will listen to you without judging, criticizing, or continually becoming distracted.

As well as helping to relieve stress, having the support of others can make a huge difference in the outlook for schizophrenia. When people who care about you are involved in your treatment, you're more likely to achieve independence and avoid relapse.

Ways to find support

Turn to trusted friends and family members. Your loved ones can help you get the right treatment, keep your symptoms under control, and function well in your community. Ask loved ones if you can call on them in times of need. Most people will be flattered by your request for support.

Stay involved with others. If you're able to continue work or education, do so. Otherwise, pursue a passion, cultivate a new hobby, or [volunteer to help other people, animals, or causes](#) important to you. As well as keeping you connected, helping others can give you a sense of purpose and boost your self-esteem.

Meet new people. Joining a schizophrenia support group can help you meet other people dealing with the same challenges and learn important coping tips. Or get involved with a local church, club, or other organization.

Find a supportive living environment. People with schizophrenia often function best when they're able to remain at home, surrounded by [supportive family members](#). If that's not a viable option for you, many communities offer residential and treatment facilities. Look for a living environment that is stable, makes you feel safe, and will enable you to follow your treatment and self-help plans.

Take advantage of support services in your area. Ask your doctor or therapist about services available in your area or contact hospitals and mental health clinics, or see the [hotlines and support](#) section below for links to support services.

Tip 4: Manage stress

The day-to-day stress of living with a challenging emotional disorder such as schizophrenia can be draining. High levels of stress also increase the body's production of the hormone cortisol, which may trigger psychotic episodes. As well as exercising and staying socially

connected, there are plenty of steps you can take to reduce your stress levels:

Know your limits, both at home and at work or school. Don't take on more than you can handle and take time for yourself if you feel overwhelmed.

Use relaxation techniques to relieve stress. [Techniques](#) such as mindfulness meditation, deep breathing, or progressive muscle relaxation can put the brakes on stress and bring your mind and body back into a state of balance.

Manage your emotions. Understanding and accepting emotions—especially those unpleasant ones most of us try to ignore—can make a huge difference in your ability to manage stress, balance your moods, and maintain control of your life. See HelpGuide's [Emotional Intelligence Toolkit](#).

Tip 5: Take care of yourself

Making simple lifestyle changes can have a huge impact on the way you feel as well as your symptoms.

Try to get plenty of sleep. When you're on medication, you most likely need even [more sleep](#) than the standard 8 hours. Many people with schizophrenia have trouble with sleep, but getting regular exercise, reducing sugar in your diet, and avoiding caffeine can help.

Avoid alcohol and drugs. It can be tempting to try to self-medicate the symptoms of schizophrenia with drugs and alcohol. But substance abuse complicates schizophrenia treatment and only worsens symptoms. If you have a substance abuse problem, [seek help](#).

Eat a healthy, balanced diet. [Eating regular, nutritious meals](#) can help avoid psychosis and other schizophrenia symptoms brought on by substantial changes in blood sugar levels. Minimize sugar and refined carbs, foods that quickly lead to a crash in mood and energy. Boost your intake of omega-3 fatty acids from fatty fish, fish oil, walnuts, and flaxseeds to help improve focus, banish fatigue, and balance your moods.

Tip 6: Understand the role of medication

If you've been diagnosed with schizophrenia, you will almost certainly be offered antipsychotic medication. The two main groups of medications used for the treatment of schizophrenia are the older or "typical" antipsychotic medications and the newer "atypical" antipsychotic medications. It's important to understand that medication is just one

component of schizophrenia treatment.

Medication is not a cure for schizophrenia and only treats some of the symptoms. Antipsychotic medication reduces psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, paranoia, and disordered thinking. But is much less helpful for treating symptoms of schizophrenia such as social withdrawal, lack of motivation, and lack of emotional expressiveness.

You should not have to put up with disabling side effects. Schizophrenia medication can have very unpleasant—even disabling—side effects such as drowsiness, lack of energy, uncontrollable movements, weight gain, and sexual dysfunction. Your quality of life is important, so talk to your doctor if you're bothered by side effects.

Never reduce or stop medication on your own.

Sudden or unsupervised dosage changes are dangerous, and can trigger a schizophrenia relapse or other complications. If you're having trouble with your medication or feel like you don't need to take it, talk to your doctor or someone else that you trust.



Get more help

[Schizophrenia: The Journey to Recovery](#) (PDF) - Handbook discusses diagnosis and treatment issues. (Canadian Psychiatric Association)

[Schizophrenia Treatment](#) - Medications and ECT used to treat schizophrenia. (Mayo Clinic)

[Schizophrenia](#) - Including self-help, treatment, and hopeful outlooks. (Royal College of Psychiatrists)

Hotlines and support

In the **U.S.**, call 1-800-950-6264 or visit [NAMI.org](#)

In the **UK**, call 0300 5000 927 or visit [Rethink: Schizophrenia](#).

In **Australia**, call 1800 18 7263 or visit [Sane Australia](#)

In **Canada**, [Schizophrenia Society of Canada](#) offers links to regional societies that offer helplines and local services

In **India**, call the Vandrevala Foundation [Helpline](#) at 1860 2662 345 or 1800 2333 330

Authors: Melinda Smith, M.A., Lawrence Robinson, and Jeanne Segal, Ph.D. Last updated: November 2019.