

# Schizophrenia



South Mississippi State Hospital and the Mississippi Department of Mental Health are working together to change the way you think about mental health. One of the most difficult challenges the field of mental health faces in Mississippi is stigma. Our goal is to eliminate misconceptions and promote a better understanding of mental health and illnesses. The following information is a way to help you “Think Again” about schizophrenia and understand the related issues.

## **What is Schizophrenia?**

Schizophrenia is a serious disorder which affects how a person thinks, feels or acts. Schizophrenia is NOT split personality or multiple personality. The vast majority of people with schizophrenia are NOT violent and do not pose a danger to others. Approximately 1 percent of the population develops schizophrenia during their lifetime—more than 2 million Americans suffer from the illness in a given year. Although schizophrenia affects men and women with equal frequency, the disorder often appears earlier in men (usually in the late teens or early twenties) than in women, who are generally affected in the twenties to early thirties.

This is a time of hope for people with schizophrenia and their families. Research is gradually leading to new and safer medications and unraveling the complex causes of the disease. Scientists are using many approaches from the study of molecular genetics to the study of populations to learn about schizophrenia. Methods of imaging the brain’s structure and function hold the promise of new insights into the disorder. Schizophrenia is a devastating brain disorder—the most chronic and disabling of the severe mental illnesses.

## **What are the signs & symptoms?**

The signs of schizophrenia are different for everyone. Symptoms may develop over months or years, or may appear very abruptly. The disease may come and go in cycles of relapse and remission. The first signs of schizophrenia typically emerge in young people in their teens or twenties; in rare cases, schizophrenia can appear in childhood. Symptoms include hallucinations, delusions, disordered thinking, unusual speech or behavior, and social withdrawal impairing the ability to interact with others.

## **What type of treatment is available?**

Available treatments can relieve many symptoms, but most people with schizophrenia continue to suffer some symptoms throughout their lives. However, new treatment advances, particularly within the last decade, have improved the outlook for many people with schizophrenia. For more information, please contact South Mississippi State Hospital at (601) 794-0100 or the Mississippi Department of Mental Health at (601) 359-1288 or your local community mental health center.

