

# facts      Schizophrenia

## **What is Schizophrenia?**

Schizophrenia is an illness, a medical condition which affects the normal functioning of the brain, interfering with a person's ability to think, feel and act. Schizophrenia is indicated when changes in behaviour or symptoms continue for a period of at least six months.

Some people recover completely, and with time, most find that their symptoms improve. For many, however, it is a prolonged illness which can involve years of distressing symptoms and disability.

## **What are the symptoms?**

People with schizophrenia often experience persistent symptoms, which may be more severe for those not receiving treatment. These include symptoms such as isolation, apathy, low motivation and social withdrawal as well as:

- **Confused thinking**

People may make unusual or illogical associations in their thinking. The everyday thoughts that let us live our daily lives become confused and disjointed.

- **Delusions**

A delusion is a false belief held by a person which is not held by others around them. For example, the person may think someone is trying to harm them when this is not true.

- **Hallucinations**

The person may see, hear, feel, smell or taste something that is not actually there. The most common type of hallucination is hearing voices which no one else can hear.

## **What causes Schizophrenia?**

The causes of schizophrenia are not fully understood, however it is known that biochemical, environmental and behavioural factors play a part. It is probable that some people are born with a predisposition to develop this kind of illness, and that certain things - for example stress or use of drugs such as marijuana, LSD or speed - can trigger a first episode. Like heart disease and diabetes, it may run in families. However the evidence suggests that genetic factors are only important in some cases.

## **How many people develop Schizophrenia?**

About one in a hundred people will develop schizophrenia at some time in their lives.

Seventy-five percent of first episodes occur in young people in their late teens and early twenties.

## **How is Schizophrenia treated?**

Treatment can do much to reduce and even eliminate the symptoms.

Treatment should generally include a combination of medication, psychosocial and community support. All are usually essential to gain the best outcome for each person.

- **Medication**

Certain medications assist the brain to restore its usual chemical balance which then helps reduce or get rid of some of the symptoms.

- **Community and psychosocial support programs**

This support should include information; accommodation; help with finding suitable work, training and education; psychosocial rehabilitation and mutual support groups. Understanding and acceptance by the community is also very important.

## **How do I find out more?**

The Schizophrenia Fellowship of North Queensland produces a range of other fact sheets and information packages. The Fellowship also offers face to face and telephone support.

**To find out more, call the Fellowship on (07) 47 253 664 or 1800 455 455.**