



LEAFLET 3

What causes Schizophrenia.

This leaflet is one of a series that have been designed to give you a better understanding of Mental Illness.

This leaflet looks at what causes schizophrenia.

Professionals, such as doctors, often use terms that not everyone understands. To help you understand such terms, they have been included in this leaflet, together with an explanation. They have been put in 'quotation' marks so that you can easily identify them.

It would probably be of help if you ask a key worker to explain how this leaflet relates to you.



It is worth remembering that:

- Most people do not have a family history of schizophrenia; if one family member has schizophrenia, it does not mean that others will develop the illness; it is only the tendency to get the illness that is inherited.

What causes schizophrenia?

Scientists have not yet discovered the cause of schizophrenia. However, they have found possible reasons explaining why some people may develop this illness.

Is it inherited?

Schizophrenia can run in families.

The abnormal 'genes' that are responsible for determining specific characteristics can be passed from one generation to another. This is known as 'genetics.'

If one parent has schizophrenia there is a one in ten chance that their child may develop the illness.

If both parents have schizophrenia there is a one in four chance that their child may develop the illness.

This does not mean that people with schizophrenia shouldn't have children, as the majority of children born to people with the illness are unaffected.

- *Genetics can make someone more vulnerable to schizophrenia but other factors can also prompt it.*

Does stress cause schizophrenia?

The illness is not caused by stress but stress can make the symptoms worse.

Symptoms can be triggered or worsened by major stressful events, such as:

- Major life change, such as going to University;
- The death of a close relative;
- The break up of a relationship.
- Losing a job.

People with schizophrenia can be particularly sensitive to stress in others.

Is it a disease of the brain?

Scientists have found that there is an imbalance in the brain chemistry of people who have schizophrenia.

No one has yet discovered the exact cause of this imbalance but the drugs that are used to treat schizophrenia are designed to try to correct the imbalance.

Considerable research into the treatment and causes of schizophrenia has already produced new drugs with fewer side effects.

As the research continues and more knowledge is gained, further treatments are likely to be developed.

Drug and Alcohol Misuse

Misuse of drugs can produce symptoms that may be similar to schizophrenia. However, if the person stops taking drugs, these symptoms will subside in a short period of time.

Excessive alcohol intake does not cause schizophrenia but may make the symptoms worse.

Sometimes, people with schizophrenia may use alcohol or drugs to try to block out some of the symptoms. This, however, is not advisable.

Is there a test for schizophrenia?

- Unfortunately not
- Schizophrenia is not always easy to recognise as people may find it difficult to talk about their symptoms.
- The onset of symptoms can be slow and the lack of clear symptoms can make early diagnosis difficult.

Do people recover from schizophrenia?

Most people with schizophrenia, can, with treatment, learn to control their symptoms and lead full and active lives.

When symptoms subside this is known as 'remission' When symptoms recur, this is called 'relapse.'

Early and effective treatment improves the long-term outcome for people with schizophrenia. For a percentage of people, there may only be one episode of the illness. However, for some people, the symptoms may only be controlled and not cured.

It is important that, even when the person feels well, they:

- Continue with medication and any other treatments that have been recommended;
- Do not stop treatment without discussion with their doctor or key worker.

Personal Notes
