



## spotlight on health

### Schizophrenia: What Everyone Should Know

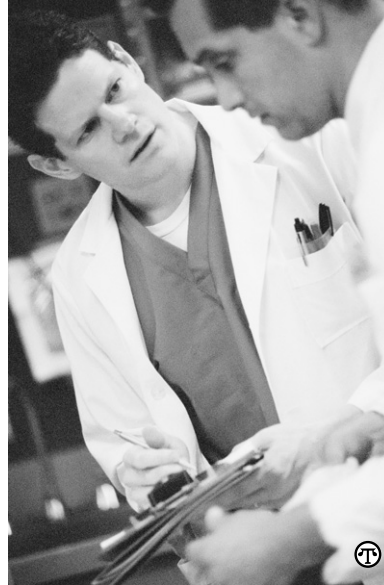
(NAPSA)—Contrary to popular opinion, not all people with schizophrenia are living in mental institutions. In fact, chances are you may know someone—a friend, a family member, a co-worker—who is living with schizophrenia, one of the most chronic and disabling of mental illnesses.

Approximately one out of every 100 people is affected by schizophrenia. The disease usually strikes in the late teens or twenties and often persists throughout adult life. Schizophrenia knows no bounds—it is found in both genders, across all races and cultures. The cause is unknown, but it is believed to result from chemical imbalances in the brain.

Symptoms of schizophrenia are generally categorized as “positive” and “negative.” Positive symptoms are those that are present but should be absent, such as hallucinations, delusions, thought disorders, and behavioral disturbances. Negative symptoms are those that are reduced or absent but that should be present. Negative symptoms seriously affect social functioning and include emotional and social withdrawal, reduced ability to experience pleasure, lack of motivation, low energy, and lack of spontaneity.

The effects of the disease are devastating to patients, their caregivers, and loved ones. Patients have an overall life expectancy that is 20 percent shorter than that of the general population. This may be partly because:

- Approximately 50 percent of patients with schizophrenia attempt suicide at least once, and approximately 10 to 15 percent of them actually commit suicide.
- More than 40 percent of schizophrenia patients are obese, as opposed to 27 percent of the general population.
- Patients with schizophrenia are at twice the risk of developing diabetes than the general population.
- Patients with schizophrenia have a 50 percent higher risk of mortality due to cardiovascular disorders.
- Thirty to 50 percent of patients with schizophrenia have a history of substance abuse.



- Seventy to 80 percent of patients with schizophrenia smoke versus 25 percent of the general population.

The impact of schizophrenia weighs heavily not only on patients and their caregivers, but on society, too. The total cost of schizophrenia—including treatment, medication, housing of patients, loss of productivity, and disability—is estimated at \$104 billion a year.

Drugs known as antipsychotics or neuroleptics are used to manage the symptoms of schizophrenia. The side effects associated with drug therapy, however, may include movement disorders, weight gain, hypertension, and hormonal changes. Other treatments, such as psychotherapy, may be beneficial.

Newer medications referred to as “atypical” antipsychotics represent an advance in treating schizophrenia due to their improved efficacy and tolerability. But they also have their own side effects, such as weight gain and diabetes, which may put patients at greater risk for cardiovascular and other complications.

To learn more about schizophrenia, visit the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill web site at [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org) or The Schizophrenia Home Page at [www.schizophrenia.com](http://www.schizophrenia.com).