

# when your brother or sister has schizophrenia

## What is schizophrenia? What causes it?

Schizophrenia is brain illness that makes it so that the brain can not tell what is real and not real. People with schizophrenia sometimes hear voices that are not there, see things that are not there, believe things that are not correct and can get very suspicious. Schizophrenia also makes it hard to think clearly and concentrate. A person with schizophrenia needs to see a doctor, and will usually need to take medication to get and stay well. This is similar to other illnesses like type one diabetes and epilepsy.

## Why is my brother or sister acting this way?

Just like it is hard to see the back of your own head, it is hard for a person whose brain is not working to tell what is wrong. Your brother or sister's brain may make up incorrect explanations for why they feel so weird, and they may act strangely. It will be really hard for them to tell the difference between what is real and not real.

## Was it something I did?

Schizophrenia is a medical illness. There's nothing you could have done to cause your brother or sister's illness.

## Will I get it too?

The risk for schizophrenia is about one in every hundred people. It is thought to be caused by genetics and environment working together. This means that it runs in families, but just because someone in your

family has schizophrenia does not mean you will get it too. It just means that your risk of getting it is a bit higher, so you need to take good care of your brain. If you have a sister or brother with schizophrenia, you have about a 10% chance of having it too. If your identical twin has schizophrenia, you have about a 50% risk.



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## Looking after your own brain

You can do your part by taking good care of your body and brain. This includes things like getting exercise, eating well, and avoiding things that are bad for the brain. Cannabis, crystal meth and other street drugs are particularly hard on the brain. For example, using cannabis (marijuana, pot) on a regular basis can increase your risk of getting schizophrenia by 40%.

If you like, you can talk to a genetic counsellor, who can help figure out what illnesses you might be at more risk for, and what you can do to stay well.

## How can I help?

You can help by being around to talk, by being positive, by giving sincere compliments and by gently encouraging your brother or sister to do things they're good at.

Doing one-on-one things with your brother or sister will be better than doing things in crowds. They are likely to be giving themselves a hard time about their illness. You can help by being encouraging and reminding them it's an illness and they will get better.



## How long will it take for them to get better?

People with schizophrenia need to take antipsychotic medication. Education about the illness and support can really help too.

There are several medications that work for schizophrenia, but not all of them work as well on one person as they do on another. It might take awhile for doctors to find the medication that works best for your brother or sister. Then your brother or sister will need to stay on their medication for it to start working and keep working. People with schizophrenia usually need to take medication for the rest of their lives, like people with epilepsy or type one diabetes do.

It can take months or years for their health to get better. Sometimes they'll have some symptoms that hang on longer. While they're recovering, they're likely to have a lot less energy to do things, be a lot quieter, need a lot more alone time, and prefer not to be in large crowds or noisy places.

**You don't have to deal with this alone. Help is available.**