

# MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

## Mental Health & Wellbeing

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# Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a mental disorder that affects a person’s ability to think clearly, including at times, unusual thoughts or suspicions, and withdrawal from others socially. These thoughts and experiences may appear to be out of touch with reality and may affect participation in education and work. Schizophrenia is part of a category of diagnoses called schizophrenia spectrum disorder.

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# What is schizophrenia?

In young people who develop schizophrenia, the first stage of the disorder is called the prodromal period. Symptoms in this stage might include a change of friends, a drop in grades, sleep problems and irritability. Other factors include isolating oneself and withdrawing from others, an increase in unusual thoughts and suspicions, and a family history of psychosis. However, these earliest signs might get overlooked due to the similarities with common and nonspecific adolescent behaviour. If you are experiencing and worried with any condition mentioned above, you may want to visit your GP to get a comprehensive medical evaluation to obtain the best diagnosis.

## Risk factors

- ▶ The risk of developing schizophrenia is nearly 6 times greater if one has a parent with schizophrenia than if one does not
- ▶ Additionally, one's risk of developing schizophrenia increases as genetic relatedness to family members diagnosed with schizophrenia increases
- ▶ Malnutrition, serious infections in pregnancy or birth complications can increase the risk of a child developing schizophrenia later in life, and people who have experienced violence or trauma are also at increased risk.

## Stages

Schizophrenia usually happens in stages, with different symptoms and behaviors depending on the stage.

- ▶ **Onset (prodrome).** This is an early phase that happens before a person develops more severe symptoms. It can include social withdrawal, anxiety, lack of motivation and neglect of personal hygiene.
- ▶ **Blips (Brief Limited Intermittent Psychotic Symptoms).** BLIPS are moderate to severe manifestations of psychosis. The symptoms can happen before the onset of severe mental illness. Symptoms for brief and limited psychosis usually last no more than one week.
- ▶ **Active.** This is when psychotic symptoms take full effect. Another term for this is "psychotic break," where a person shows a disconnection from reality. That includes showing at least two of the five main symptoms listed under symptoms of schizophrenia.
- ▶ **Residual.** People in this stage still have some schizophrenia signs and symptoms, but they're not as severe. Odd beliefs, lack of motivation, decreased feelings of enjoyment or pleasure, limited speaking and reduced emotional expression tend to be the most noticeable effects. Many people often improve to the point where they seem mostly or fully recovered. However, this is usually temporary, and symptoms of schizophrenia will return as a person goes back into the active stage of the condition.

## Symptoms of schizophrenia

When schizophrenia come to more advanced stage, some of the [following symptoms](#) are present for at least 6 months:

- ▶ **Persistent delusion:** fixed beliefs that something is true, despite evidence to the contrary.
- ▶ **Persistent hallucinations:** hearing, smelling, seeing, touching or feeling things that are not there
- ▶ **Disorganized thinking:** jumbled or irrelevant thought and speech
- ▶ **Disorganized behavior:** unusual, inappropriate or extreme actions
- ▶ **'Negative symptoms':** low motivation, fewer expressed emotions, feeling less pleasure in everyday life or difficulties with attention or memory. Losing function in daily activities.

## Strategies to manage schizophrenia

We understand that living with schizophrenia can be challenging, so it's important to get treatment sooner rather than later because early diagnosis and treatment improve the odds of a positive outcome.

The best place to start in getting a diagnosis is a **General Practitioner**. They can make an assessment and provide a referral to a **psychiatrist** for full diagnosis and treatment if needed. Moreover, Schizophrenia takes time to diagnose. It is normal to take six months or longer to be confirmed

As a method of early intervention, your doctor or psychiatrist might develop a **mental health care plan** for you. This may include case management, support for families and carers, group programs, and minimizing disruptions to school and work

- ▶ **Psychological treatments** can help you to understand and manage your symptoms and learn new ways of coping. <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/cognitive-behaviour-therapy-cbt> **behavior therapy (CBT)**, supportive psychotherapy and family therapy may all be used.
- ▶ **Antipsychotic medications** are usually a first line of treatment if you develop schizophrenia. They can reduce the main symptoms like hallucinations and delusions, and normally take up to 6 weeks to start working. It is crucial to schedule regular meetings with your psychiatrist or GP to manage any potential side effects.

The suggestions listed below can help people with schizophrenia take care of themselves and better manage their condition:

- ▶ **Take medications as prescribed.** If you have schizophrenia, you should **not** stop your medication without talking to your healthcare provider. Sudden stopping of medication often speeds up the return of psychosis symptoms. Antipsychotics frequently cause side effects. However, it's possible to discover one that both works well for you and has little to no side effects by working with your healthcare physician.
- ▶ **See your healthcare provider as recommended.** Your healthcare provider will set up a schedule for you to see them. These visits are especially important to help with managing your condition.
- ▶ **Avoid alcohol and recreational drug use.** Alcohol and drug use can make schizophrenia symptoms worse and can lead to other issues. This includes using prescription medications in a way other than prescribed.

- ▶ **Regular routine.** Have a good night's sleep. It can enhance your mood and thinking and keep your mental wellness on track. Set a schedule for your meals each day. Your days will be more stable and predictable as a result.

If you or someone you care about has been diagnosed with schizophrenia, having support from family and friends can help lower stress and create a feeling of inclusion. It's okay for family and friends of someone to prioritise their own mental and physical health while they are supporting someone.

## Schizophrenia and my studies

Schizophrenia can make it hard to manage due dates, stay organised, and focus on assignments, all of which can make doing well at university harder. However, with the right university, community, and social supports, you can take control and manage your studies in a way that work for you.

- ▶ **Seek services for your wellbeing:** It may be helpful to speak to someone professional, whether it's on or off campus. Getting help from the WSU Wellbeing services or attending a counselling session can encourage a safe space to talk about schizophrenia and ways to manage it with your studies
- ▶ **Obtain Social Support:** Having supportive people in your life is crucial paramount to balancing schizophrenia. This may mean reaching out to your existing network or confiding in a family member or distant friend can provide you with the [social support](#) you need.
- ▶ **Consider goal setting:** Creating goals that are achievable can help you stay on track, and provide a sense of structure when studying and meeting university assignment deadlines. Goals can help generate predictability and allow you to attain your aims with decreased distractions.

## University Support

WSU resources:

If schizophrenia is creating barriers that may affect your studies or you want support to optimise your study then the WSU [Counselling Service](#), [Disability Service](#), or [Student Welfare Service](#) may be able to help.

- ▶ **WSU [Counselling Service](#).**

Students can access free, short term, confidential counselling services. Face to face, Zoom or phone appointments can be made by telephoning 1300 668 370. Our office hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am - 4:30pm. Alternatively, or email [counselling@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:counselling@westernsydney.edu.au)

▶ **WSU [Disability Service](#).**

The Disability Service is free to access with Disability Advisors assisting students to meet their full potential. If you have a diagnosed physical, psychological or medical condition that impacts on your studies, you may be eligible for an [Academic Integration Plan \(AIP\)](#), developed by the Disability Service. Contact the Disability Service on 1300 668 370, email [disability@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:disability@westernsydney.edu.au) or make contact via [WesternNow](#).

▶ **WSU [Student Welfare Service](#).**

Academic, Personal and Financial Hardship, International Support and Accommodation: 1300 668 370 or via [WesternNow](#).

▶ **Multifaith [Chaplaincy](#)**

Multifaith Chaplaincy can provide confidential conversation and care, support for stress management and anxiety with links to religious groups and faith communities. For more information, please call Daniel Jantos on 0402771543 or email [d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au).

▶ **WesternLife**

[WesternLife](#) - Join thousands of students at Your Virtual Community to share experiences, learn new things, connect with new friends, and engage with events or discussions that interest you!

▶ **Disruption to Studies**

Consider applying for [Disruption to Studies](#) and [Requests for Extension](#) if you feel as though your studies have been significantly impacted.

▶ **Deferred Exam**

[Deferred Exam](#) – You can apply for a Deferred Exam no later than 5.00 pm on the second working day after your scheduled exam if you are unable to attend a final exam due to serious

illness, misadventure or other exceptional circumstances beyond your control. Submit a [Student Form](#) and attach supporting documents online for application.

▶ **Withdraw Without Academic Penalty**

[Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty](#) is an option available after the Census Date of the teaching term provided that you meet eligibility.

▶ **Leave of Absence**

A [Leave of Absence](#) is a temporary break from studying. Once you have completed one or more subjects in your enrolled program, you can apply for a Leave of Absence. A Leave of Absence can be taken as either six or twelve months. The maximum amount of leave you can take during your program is twelve months. Please note, you must submit your application before the relevant Census Date.

If you are considering any of these options, please reach out to the counselling service for support and guidance. If you are an international student, please make sure you seek advice particularly if you are considering withdrawing without penalty or taking a leave of absence as these may have [implications for your visa conditions](#).

## Community Support

Community resources:

- [Lifeline](#).

If you are really struggling during the night when completing assessments or feel most alone, contact [Lifeline](#) (24 hours crisis counselling) - **13 11 14** or, Lifeline SMS Counselling Service - between 6pm- Midnight you can text **0477 13 11 14** and somebody will text you back!

- **Mental Health Telephone Access Line**

[Mental Health Telephone Access Line](#) - 1800 011 511

This Mental Health Line is staffed by mental health professionals that can help and provide you advice about your needs and discuss referrals to local mental health services. It is available to everyone in NSW and operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

- ▶ Visit your GP or psychiatrist to talk about your condition
- ▶ [Sane](#) is an organization that provides useful information and resources for someone with schizophrenia or their family and friends. Sane also has free counselling service - telephone **1800187263** and [online support](#) for people concerned about complex mental health issues.
- ▶ Resources for family and friends: [Mental health first aid for psychosis](#), [SANE Friends, Family & Carers Forum](#); [Mental Health Carers Australia](#); [Ways to Support a Loved One with Schizophrenia](#)
- ▶ This is an early psychosis treatment [guide](#) provide by Orygen
- ▶ You can make a free call to [Head to Health](#) on 1800 595 212 for advice and connection to the local mental health service or support that is right for you. This may involve referring you to your local Head to Health center or Pop Up clinic. The Head to Health Phone Service is available Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm (except public holidays).

## Resources

- ▶ [Podcasts](#)
- ▶ [Videos](#)
- ▶ [Apps](#)

### Podcasts

#### **“Unpacking the Stigma of Schizophrenia”**

In this episode, Rachel and Gabe explore the stigma of mental illness and share their personal experiences, including perspectives from around the world.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/unpacking-the-stigma-of-schizophrenia/id1462663894?i=1000522324504>

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/2MjkKOsFQ7UjG4ilhWsHx8?si=052b399167e24043>

## “What is Schizophrenia”

Rachel discusses symptoms including the differences between hallucinations, delusions, and how you can manage these.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/what-is-schizophrenia/id1462663894?i=1000438997418>

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/5NRILUHqySVGfTudWLkPh5?si=9accc6d43623487d>

### Videos

#### What is schizophrenia? – Anees Bahji

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2sc\\_ck5BZU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2sc_ck5BZU)

#### What’s it like to live with #schizophrenia?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvN7R1oRuOI>

### Apps

You might find it helpful to try the following apps if you have difficulties on managing your daily routine:

- ▶ **My daily Planner:** Available on *Android* Price: FREE This app includes calendar, to-do list, reminder, and daily planner features. You can use it to organize your daily routine and recurring tasks.
- ▶ **Structured-Daily Planner:** Available on *IOS & MacOS* Price: FREE Structured combines your calendars and tasks. Set a time and duration for everything you need to do and get a visual timeline of your day,
- ▶ **Sleep cycle:** Available on *IOS, Android* Price: FREE The app can track how long you sleep, the quality of your sleep, and other factors such as heart rate. It even tracks whether there are any noises or whether you snore or sleep talk.
- ▶ **EatWise-Meal reminder:** Available on *IOS, Android* Price: FREE An app called Eatwise helps you schedule your mealtime and the amount of servings you want to have. It will keep a check on your schedule and remind you to eat.
- ▶ **Excel+Microsoft Office Daily Schedule templates:** Available on *IOS, Android, Web* Price: FREE with university account. Track your daily and weekly tasks easily using this interactive work schedule template.



Add events to the event scheduler tab, select the appropriate day on the daily schedule tab, and allow Excel to help manage your day.

## Still struggling?

If you are still struggling, reach out to the WSU counselling team for support and advice. If you prefer to seek support from a service outside of the university, it may be helpful to speak to your General Practitioner regarding a [Mental Health Care Plan](#) and referral to a psychologist, or you can speak to a counsellor or other health professional. Remember you are not alone and there will always be someone out there who is willing to stay with you through your hard times.

**View a PDF version of this webpage [here](#).**

### References:

[Western Sydney University- Disruption to Studies Policy](#)

[Western Sydney University- Withdrawing without academic penalty](#)

[Western Sydney University- Counselling Service](#)

[Western Sydney University- Student Welfare Service](#)

[Western Sydney University- WesternNow](#)

[Western Sydney University- Chaplaincy](#)

[Western Sydney University- TalkCampus](#)

[Beyond Blue- Online chat](#)

[Health Direct – CBT](#)

[National Alliance on Mental Health - Schizophrenia](#)

[Rethink Mental Illness - Schizophrenia](#)

[Mayo Clinic – Schizophrenia](#)

[World Health Organisation – Schizophrenia](#)