

## Schizophrenia

*Shortly after turning 21, Gavin began hearing voices in his head after he got into bed at night that urged him to not fall asleep. If he fell asleep, these voices warned, he would die overnight. Gavin tried obeying these voices and stayed up until the wee hours of the morning before he inevitably fell asleep. When he woke up, he would see a black, hooded, ghostlike figure peering at him from the corner of his bedroom. Gavin would then scream for his roommate to come in to get rid of the ghost, but his roommate never saw anything and thought Gavin was playing a practical joke on him.*

Someone with **schizophrenia** may have an experience like the one above.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, schizophrenia affects 2.4 million American adults.<sup>1</sup> It affects men and women with equal frequency, but most often appears in men in their late teens or early 20s and in women in their late 20s or early 30s.<sup>1</sup>

According to MentalHealth.gov, it is a “severe, lifelong brain disorder. People who have it may hear voices, see things that aren't there or believe that others are reading or controlling their minds.”<sup>2</sup>

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, there are three broad categories of schizophrenia symptoms: positive symptoms, negative symptoms, and cognitive symptoms. Positive symptoms are “psychotic behaviors not seen in healthy people. People with positive symptoms often lose touch with reality. These symptoms can come and go. Sometimes they are severe and at other times hardly noticeable, depending on whether the individual is receiving treatment.”<sup>3</sup> **Positive symptoms** of schizophrenia can include:

- Hallucinations
- Delusions
- Thought disorders – dysfunctional ways of thinking, such as disorganized thinking, suddenly stop speaking in the middle of a thought, making up meaningless words
- Movement disorders – agitated body movements, such as repeating certain motions, or becoming catatonic (not moving, not responding to others)<sup>3</sup>

“Negative symptoms are associated with disruptions to normal emotions and behaviors. These symptoms are harder to recognize as part of the disorder and can be mistaken for depression or other conditions.”<sup>3</sup> **Negative symptoms** of schizophrenia can include:

- "Flat affect" (a person's face does not move or he or she talks in a dull or monotonous voice)
- Lack of pleasure in everyday life
- Lack of ability to begin and sustain planned activities
- Speaking little, even when forced to interact<sup>3</sup>

**Cognitive symptoms** of schizophrenia can include:

- Poor "executive functioning" (the ability to understand information and use it to make decisions)

- Trouble focusing or paying attention
- Problems with "working memory" (the ability to use information immediately after learning it)<sup>3</sup>

## Bibliography

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<sup>1</sup> National Alliance on Mental Illness, "Schizophrenia." Accessed July 26, 2013.  
<http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=schizophrenia9>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, "Schizophrenia." Accessed July 26, 2013.  
<http://www.mentalhealth.gov/what-to-look-for/psychotic-disorders/schizophrenia/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> The National Institute of Mental Health, "Schizophrenia." Accessed July 26, 2013.  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/schizophrenia/index.shtml>.

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