

Schizophrenia Tips For Family

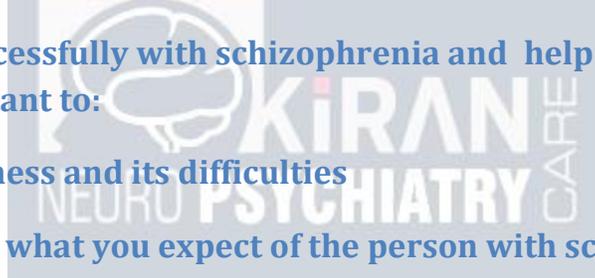
Schizophrenia and the family:

HOW TO HELP YOUR LOVED ONE ?

- If a family member or someone close to you has schizophrenia, you may be struggling with any number of difficult emotions, including fear, guilt, anger, frustration, and hopelessness.
- The illness may be difficult for you to accept. You may feel helpless in the face of your loved one's symptoms.
- Or you may be worried about the stigma of schizophrenia, or confused and embarrassed by strange behaviors you don't understand.
- You may even be tempted to hide your loved one's illness from others.

In order to deal successfully with schizophrenia and help your family member, it's important to:

1. Accept the illness and its difficulties
2. Be realistic in what you expect of the person with schizophrenia and of yourself
3. Maintain a sense of humor
4. Do your best to help your family member feel better and enjoy life, pay the same attention to your own needs, and remain hopeful.



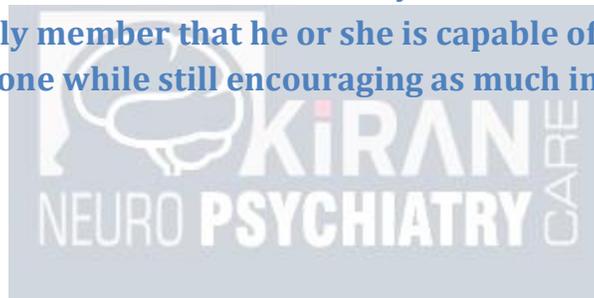
Tips for helping a family member with schizophrenia

Educate yourself. Learning about schizophrenia and its treatment will allow you to make informed decisions about how best to manage the illness, work toward recovery, and handle setbacks.

Reduce stress. Stress can cause schizophrenia symptoms to flare up, so it's important to create a structured and supportive environment for your family member. Avoid putting pressure on your loved one or criticizing perceived shortcomings.

Set realistic expectations. It's important to be realistic about the challenges and limitations of schizophrenia. Help your loved one set and achieve manageable goals, and be patient with the pace of recovery.

Empower your loved one. Be careful that you're not taking over and doing things for your family member that he or she is capable of doing. Try to support your loved one while still encouraging as much independence as possible.



HELPING PEOPLE WITH SCHIZOPHRENIA

TIP 1: TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

In order to successfully deal with schizophrenia in a family member, you need to take care of your own needs and find healthy ways of coping with the challenges you and your loved one face.

Put on your own oxygen mask first

Keeping a positive outlook is much easier when you have others you can turn to for support. Like your loved one with schizophrenia, you too need help, encouragement, and understanding. When you feel supported and cared for, you, in turn, will be better able to support and care for your loved one.

Join a support group. **One of the best ways to cope with schizophrenia is by joining a family support group. Meeting others who know first-hand what you're going through can help reduce feelings of isolation and fear. Support groups provide an invaluable venue for the relatives of people with schizophrenia to share experiences, advice, and information.**

Make time for yourself. **Schedule time into your day for things you enjoy, whether it be spending time in nature, visiting with friends, or reading a good book. Taking breaks from caregiving will help you stay positive and avoid burnout.**

Look after your health. **Neglecting your health only adds to the stress in your life. Maintain your physical well-being by getting enough sleep, exercising regularly, eating a balanced diet, and staying on top of any medical conditions.**

Cultivate other relationships. **It's important to maintain other supportive, fulfilling relationships. Don't feel guilty for looking after your social needs. You need support, too. These relationships will help buoy you in difficult times.**

The importance of managing stress

Schizophrenia places an incredible amount of stress on family members. If you're not careful, it can take over your life and quickly burn you out. And if you're stressed out and overwhelmed, you will make the person with schizophrenia stressed. That's why keeping your own stress levels under control is one of the most important things you can do for a family member with schizophrenia.

Practice acceptance. The "why me?" mindset is destructive. Instead of dwelling on the unfairness of life, accept your feelings (even the negative ones). Your burdens don't have to define your life unless you obsess about them.

Seek out joy. Making time for fun isn't frivolous or indulgent—it's necessary. It isn't the people who have the least problems who are the happiest, it's the people who learn to find joy in life despite adversity.

Recognize your own limits. Be realistic about the level of support and care you can provide. You can't do it all, and you won't be much help to a loved one if you're run down and emotionally exhausted.

Avoid blame. In order to cope with schizophrenia in a family member, it's important to understand that although you can make a positive difference, you aren't to blame for the illness or responsible for your loved one's recovery.

Tips for keeping stress in check—no matter the challenges in your life

Dealing with schizophrenia in a family member can be stressful, but you can keep your stress levels in check by learning and practicing a variety of stress management techniques.

TIP 2: ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT TREATMENT

The best way to assist the recovery of a family member with schizophrenia is to get them into treatment and help them stick with it. Often, the first challenge of treatment is convincing the ill relative to see a doctor. To people experiencing delusions, hallucinations, and paranoia, there is no need for medical intervention because the voices and conspiracy theories are real.

If a family member with schizophrenia is reluctant to see a doctor, the following strategies might help:

Provide options – Your loved one may be more willing to see a doctor if he or she can control the situation somewhat. If your relative appears suspicious of you, suggest another person to accompany him or her to the appointment. You can also give your family member a choice of doctors.

Focus on a particular symptom – A person with schizophrenia may resist seeing a doctor out of fear of being judged or labeled “crazy.” You can make the doctor less threatening by suggesting a visit in order to deal with a specific symptom such as insomnia or a lack of energy.

Tips for supporting a family member’s schizophrenia treatment

Seek help right away. Early intervention makes a difference in the course of schizophrenia, so don’t wait to get professional help. You family member will need assistance finding a good doctor and other effective treatments.

Encourage independence. Rather than doing everything for your family member, encourage self-care and self-confidence. Help your loved one develop or relearn skills that will allow for greater independence of functioning.

Be collaborative. It’s important that your loved one have a voice in his or her treatment. When your family member feels respected and acknowledged, he or she will be more motivated to follow through with treatment and work toward recovery.

TIP 3: MONITOR MEDICATION

Once your family member is in treatment, careful monitoring can ensure that he or she is staying on track and getting the most out of medication. You can help out in the following ways.

Take side effects seriously. **Many people stop taking their schizophrenia medication because of side effects, so pay attention to your loved one's drug complaints. Bring any distressing side effects to the attention of the doctor. The doctor may be able to reduce adverse effects by reducing the dose, switching to another antipsychotic, or adding another medication that targets the troublesome side effect.**

Encourage your loved one to take medication regularly. **Even with side effects under control, some people with schizophrenia refuse medication or take it irregularly. This may be due to a lack of insight into their illness and the importance of medication, or they may simply have trouble remembering their daily dose. Medication calendars, weekly pillboxes, and timers can help people who are forgetful. Two typical antipsychotics, Haldol and Prolixin, are also available in a long-acting injectable form, given as shots every 2 to 4 weeks, eliminating the need for a daily pill.**

Be careful to avoid drug interactions. **Antipsychotic medications can cause unpleasant and dangerous side effects when combined with other substances, including certain prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbs. Help your family member avoid any problems by giving the doctor a complete list of the drugs and supplements he or she is taking. Mixing alcohol or illegal drugs with schizophrenia medication is also harmful, so talk to the doctor if your relative has a substance abuse problem.**

Track your family member's progress. **You can help the doctor track treatment progress by documenting changes in your family member's behavior, mood, and other symptoms in response to medication. A journal or diary is a good way to record medication history, side effects, and everyday details that might otherwise be forgotten.**

TIP 4: WATCH FOR SIGNS OF RELAPSE

Stopping medication is the most frequent cause of relapse in schizophrenia, so it's extremely important that your family member continues to take all medication as directed. Many people whose schizophrenia is stabilized or in remission still require medication to maintain their treatment gains and keep symptoms at bay.

Unfortunately, even if a person is taking medication as prescribed, relapse into an acute psychotic episode of schizophrenia can occur. But if you learn to recognize the early warning signs of relapse and take immediate steps to deal with them, you may be able to prevent a full-blown crisis. The warning signs of relapse are often similar to the symptoms and behaviors that led up to the person's first psychotic episode.

Common warning signs of schizophrenia relapse

Insomnia	Hostility
Social withdrawal	Confusing or nonsensical speech
Deterioration of personal hygiene	Strange disappearances
Increasing paranoia	Hallucinations

If you notice any warning signs of relapse or other indications that your family member's symptoms of schizophrenia are getting worse, call the doctor right away.

TIP 5: PREPARE FOR CRISIS SITUATIONS

Despite your best efforts to prevent relapse, there may be times when your family member's condition deteriorates rapidly and drastically. During a schizophrenia crisis, you must get help for your family member as soon as possible. Hospitalization may be required to keep your loved one safe.

Emergency planning

It's important for the family members of people with schizophrenia to prepare for such crisis situations. Having an emergency plan ready for an acute psychotic episode will help you handle the crisis safely and quickly. A good emergency plan for a family member with schizophrenia includes:

A list of emergency contact information for your loved one's doctor, therapists, and the police.

The address and phone number of the hospital you will go to in case of emergency for psychiatric admission.

Friends or relatives who will take care of other children or dependents while you deal with the crisis.

It's also wise to go over the emergency plan with your family member. The crisis situation may be less frightening and upsetting to your loved one if he or she knows what to expect during an emergency.

10 Tips for Handling a Schizophrenia Crisis

Remember that you cannot reason with acute psychosis

Remember that the person may be terrified by his/her own feelings of loss of control

Do not express irritation or anger

Do not shout

Do not use sarcasm as a weapon

Decrease distractions (turn off the TV, radio, fluorescent lights that hum, etc.)

Ask any casual visitors to leave—the fewer people the better

Avoid direct continuous eye contact

Avoid touching the person

Sit down and ask the person to sit down also

Source: *World Fellowship for Schizophrenia and Allied Disorders*

TIP 6: EXPLORE HOUSING OPTIONS

Treatment for schizophrenia cannot succeed if your family member doesn't have a stable, supportive place to live. But finding the right living situation for a person with schizophrenia can be challenging. When considering housing options, think about the individual needs of the person with schizophrenia:

Can your family member care for him or herself?

How much support does he or she need with daily activities?

Does your family member have a drug or alcohol problem?

How much treatment supervision does he or she require?

Living with family

For many families, the most difficult choice involves whether or not the relative with schizophrenia should live at home. Living with family can be a good option for people with schizophrenia if their family members understand the illness well, have a strong support system of their own, and are willing and able to provide whatever assistance is needed.

At-home arrangements are less likely to be successful if the person with schizophrenia uses drugs or alcohol, resists taking medication, or is aggressive or uncooperative.