

Schizoaffective Disorder

Introduction

Schizoaffective disorder is a type of mental illness. People with schizoaffective disorder have symptoms similar to schizophrenia. People with schizoaffective disorder sense or believe things that are not real. They also have symptoms of mood disorders. These include extreme emotional highs and lows. The symptoms of schizoaffective disorder can be disabling. The disorder may make it hard to live a normal life.

This reference summary explains schizoaffective disorder. It talks about the symptoms and causes of the disorder. It also explains how schizoaffective disorder is diagnosed and treated.



Schizoaffective Disorder

Schizoaffective disorder is a serious mental illness. It is not well understood. It affects people differently. If left untreated, it can be hard for a person to live a normal life.

People with schizoaffective disorder have symptoms of both schizophrenia and mood disorders. Schizophrenia is a condition that causes a person to have hallucinations and delusions. People with schizoaffective disorder lose touch with reality. Mood disorders cause a person to have extreme emotional highs and lows. People with schizoaffective disorder have problems with their mood.

Anyone can get schizoaffective disorder. But it is more common in women. Symptoms of the disorder often start between the ages of 20 and 30.



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People with schizoaffective disorder may have other mental health problems. These include:

- Anxiety.
- Depression.
- Substance abuse problems.
- Suicidal thoughts or actions.

People with schizoaffective disorder may be more likely to develop schizophrenia.

Symptoms

Schizoaffective disorder affects people differently. The most common symptoms are psychotic symptoms and severe mood changes. Psychotic symptoms are like the symptoms of schizophrenia. Severe mood changes are like the symptoms of a mood disorder.

Hallucinations and delusions are the most common psychotic symptoms. Hallucinations cause a person to see, hear, or feel people or things that are not real. They may cause you to hear voices when no one is speaking. Delusions are when people believe things that are not true. People who have delusions may believe that people on the radio and television are talking directly to them. They may believe that other people are trying to hurt them.

Other psychotic symptoms of schizoaffective disorder include:

- Problems with attention or memory.
- Repeating certain movements over and over.
- Speaking in a way that other people cannot understand.
- Strange, confusing or unwanted thoughts.

People with schizoaffective disorder also experience mood changes. These changes can be either manic or depressive.



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Manic symptoms of schizoaffective disorder include:

- Anger.
- Irritability.
- Paranoia.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Unusually high sex drive.

Depressive symptoms of schizoaffective disorder include:

- Constantly feeling sad.
- Unusual tiredness.
- Trouble concentrating.

Other depressive symptoms include:

- Eating too little or too much.
- Sleeping too little or too much.
- Suicidal thoughts or actions.



Psychotic symptoms and mood symptoms may or may not happen at the same time. This can make it hard to diagnose schizoaffective disorder. People with depression or mania may have psychotic symptoms when their condition is at its worst. But they may not have schizoaffective disorder.

Causes

No one is sure what causes schizoaffective disorder. But there are several known factors that may contribute to the disorder. One factor that may cause schizoaffective disorder is a person's genetic makeup. You are more likely to develop schizoaffective disorder if someone in your family has it.

Scientists think that problems with chemical reactions in the brain cause schizoaffective disorder. Some people think birth complications may play a role in causing schizoaffective disorder.



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Diagnosis

Your health care provider will talk to you about your social and medical history. They will ask about symptoms and family history. They may also talk to family members or friends about any changes in behavior. Many symptoms of schizoaffective disorder are the same as other disorders or diseases. Along with other symptoms, you must have had psychotic symptoms without mood symptoms for at least 2 weeks to be diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder.

Your health care provider may choose to do a blood test. They may take images of your brain. This can help to make sure the symptoms are not caused by any other diseases or disorders.



Treatment

Lifelong treatment of schizoaffective disorder can help control symptoms. With treatment, many people improve enough to lead satisfying lives.

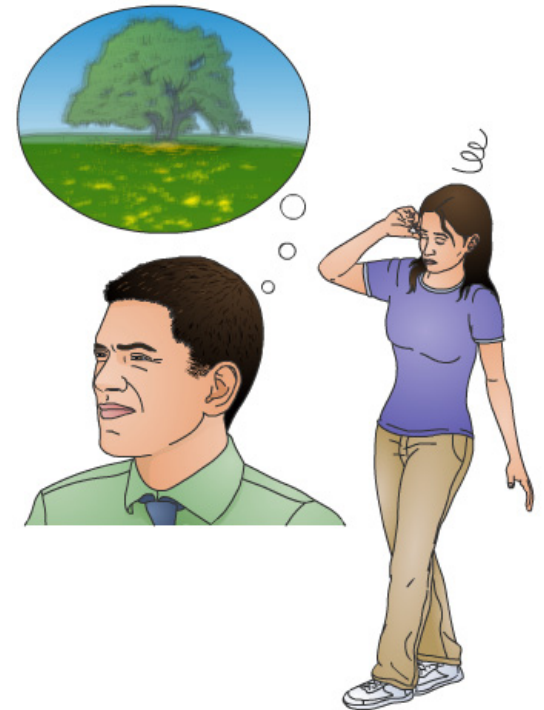
Antipsychotic medicines can help with the psychotic symptoms of schizoaffective disorder. These medicines treat delusions and hallucinations. They can also help with paranoia. These medicines change the balance of chemicals in the brain. It may take several tries before you find the right medicine for you.

Antipsychotic medicines can cause serious side effects, including:

- Blurry vision.
- Dizziness.
- Feeling restless and having a fast heartbeat.

Other possible side effects include:

- Skin rashes and sensitivity to the sun.
- Uncontrollable body movements and stiffness.
- Weight gain.



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Some side effects often go away after a few days. Others take more time. You should always tell your health care provider about any side effects you experience. Mood-balancing medications can be used to treat manic symptoms. They can help with emotional highs and lows.

Antidepressants can be used for people who have depressive symptoms. Antidepressants can help treat sadness and feelings of hopelessness. They can also help with sleep problems and concentration.

Mood-balancing medications and antidepressants can cause side effects. Rarely, these side effects can be serious. Talk to your health care provider about possible side effects from these medications.

A therapist can help patients better understand and adjust to living with schizoaffective disorder. The therapist can provide:

- Help adjusting to medications.
- Education about the disorder.
- Explanation of symptoms or problems.



Family or group therapy can also help treat schizoaffective disorder. They can help a person with schizoaffective disorder feel more comfortable talking about their issues.

People with schizoaffective disorder should avoid drugs and alcohol. They can make medicines less effective. Smoking cigarettes can also make antipsychotic medicines less helpful. People with schizoaffective disorder should consider quitting smoking.

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Family or group therapy can also help treat schizoaffective disorder. They can help a person with schizoaffective disorder feel more comfortable talking about their issues.

Schizoaffective disorder is not well understood. Symptoms of schizoaffective disorder differ from person to person. Some people with schizoaffective disorder are disabled by their symptoms. But treatment can help many people lead satisfying lives.

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