

mind hk



Understanding schizophrenia

了解精神分裂症

Mind HK was founded and is jointly supported by Mind UK and the Patient Care Foundation
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Understanding schizophrenia 了解精神分裂症

This booklet explains what schizophrenia is, its causes and how it is treated. It also offers practical suggestions for self-help, and information for friends and family.

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What is schizophrenia?

什麼是精神分裂症？

Schizophrenia is a diagnosis you may be given if you experience some of the following symptoms:

- a lack of interest in things
- feeling disconnected from your feelings
- difficulty concentrating
- wanting to avoid people
- hallucinations
- hearing voices
- delusions
- feeling like you need to be protected.

“What was real and what was not? I couldn’t tell the difference any longer and it was exhausting.”

“For me, the paranoia is the worst. It is very real and frightening.”

For some people these experiences or beliefs can start happening quite suddenly, but for others they can occur more gradually. You may become upset, anxious, confused and suspicious of other people, particularly anyone who doesn’t agree with your perceptions. You may be unaware or reluctant to believe that you need help.

“I was finding it difficult to talk. The words in my mind just would not come out.”

Delusions, hearing voices and hallucinations are all types of psychosis. See

Mind's booklets Understanding psychosis (online), Understanding paranoia and How to cope with hearing voices for more information.

Positive and negative symptoms

正性和負性症狀

You may hear professionals talk about positive or negative symptoms. This is just a way that people group the symptoms of schizophrenia.

- Positive symptoms – things that most people do not normally experience, for example strange thinking, hallucinations and delusions.
- Negative symptoms – when you lack some emotional responses or thought processes that most people normally experience, for example lack of motivation.

Impact on day-to-day life

到日常生活的影響

The symptoms of schizophrenia can be disruptive and have an impact on your ability to carry on with day-to-day tasks, such as going to work, maintaining relationships with other people, caring for yourself or for others.

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) can help you to deal with this added stress and to develop ways of managing your symptoms (see p.9). You might also find it helpful to talk and share coping tips with other people in the same situation. See 'Use peer support' on p.16 or 'Useful contacts' on p.21 for organisations that can help you find groups like this in your area.

Schizophrenia and stigma

精神分裂症與歧視

There is more media misinformation about schizophrenia than about any other type of mental health problem. A diagnosis of schizophrenia does not mean 'split personality', or indicate that someone will swing wildly from being calm to being out of control.

Sensational stories in the press tend to present people with schizophrenia as dangerous, even though most people diagnosed with schizophrenia don't commit violent crimes. We often think that people who hear voices are dangerous, but actually voices are more likely to suggest that you harm yourself than someone else. It's important to remember that people also have a choice in whether they do what the voices say.

Diagnoses related to schizophrenia 與精神分裂症相關的疾病

There are several diagnoses that share many of the same symptoms. For more information on schizoaffective disorder, see Mind's booklet *Understanding schizoaffective disorder*.

For information on schizotypal personality disorder or schizoid personality disorder, see *Understanding personality disorders*.

Different views about diagnosis 對於精神分裂症的不同看法

Views on schizophrenia have changed over the years. Lots of people have questioned whether schizophrenia is actually one condition or if it might actually be a few different conditions that overlap. Some people say that what the condition is called doesn't matter and that it would be more helpful to focus on relieving specific symptoms and individual needs.

Other people argue that because psychiatric experts can't agree on the definition, causes or suitable treatments for schizophrenia, it shouldn't be used as a diagnostic category at all.

The reality is that many people are still diagnosed with schizophrenia. If you are one of them, it might be helpful to think of a diagnosis more as a tool for treating what you're currently experiencing, rather than a definite condition or label that you will have to live with forever.

What causes schizophrenia?

為什麼會患上精神分裂症？

It is generally agreed that schizophrenia is caused by a combination of factors rather than a single one.

Dopamine 多巴胺

Dopamine is one of the chemicals that carries messages between brain cells. There is evidence that too much dopamine may be involved in the development of schizophrenia, but it's still not clear how, or whether everyone diagnosed with schizophrenia has too much dopamine. Neuroleptic drugs (antipsychotics), which are sometimes used to treat schizophrenia, target the dopamine system (see 'Medication' on p.10).

Stressful life events 生活壓力

Highly stressful or life-changing events may trigger schizophrenia. These include:

- social isolation
- being out of work
- living in poverty
- being homeless
- losing someone close to you

- being physically or verbally abused, or harassed.

Drug abuse 濫用藥物

Some people may develop symptoms of schizophrenia as a result of using cannabis or other street drugs such as cocaine and amphetamines. If you already have schizophrenia, using street drugs can make the symptoms worse. Drinking alcohol and smoking may also limit how effectively medicines treat the symptoms of schizophrenia. (See Mind's booklet Understanding the mental health effects of street drugs for more information.)

Inheritance 遺傳

Some families seem to be prone to schizophrenia, which suggests a genetic link. Rather than there being a specific gene for schizophrenia however, it is thought that certain genes might make some people more vulnerable to the condition.

Other causes 其他原因

Research is happening all the time into what might cause schizophrenia. For example there is evidence that physical differences in, or injury to the brain may be linked to schizophrenia, and that some of this process might happen before someone is born. Research into other possible causes, including viruses, hormonal activity (particularly in women), diet, allergic reaction or infection is ongoing.

Are some people more likely to be diagnosed than others? 有些人會更容易患上精神分裂症嗎？

About one in every hundred people is diagnosed with schizophrenia. It seems to affect roughly the same number of men and women. Most people diagnosed with schizophrenia are aged between 18 and 35, with men tending to be diagnosed at a slightly younger age than women. Some studies suggest that living in cities increases the risk of developing schizophrenia.

What treatments are available?

現時有什麼治療方法？

If you think you need professional help, the first step is to visit your GP. If you are experiencing symptoms related to schizophrenia, your GP will probably refer you to psychiatric services for an assessment, treatment and care. However, before you have any treatment, all possible treatment options should be discussed with you, and your views and wishes should be taken into account.

Different things work for different people so you may need to try a few types of treatment before you find what works best for you. If you have difficulty getting the treatments you would like, you may find it helpful to use an advocate. (See 'Advocacy' on p.13 and Mind's booklet *The Mind guide to advocacy* for more information.)

Talking treatments 心理（談話）治療

Talking treatments provide a regular time and space for you to talk about

your troubles and explore difficult feelings with a trained professional. You can either seek treatment from your GP or from a private therapist. Private therapists should be appropriately trained and accredited. (See 'Useful contacts' on p.21 for details of where to find accredited therapists.)

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) 認知行為療法 (CBT)

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is a talking treatment which aims to identify connections between thoughts, feelings and behaviour, and to help develop practical skills to manage any negative patterns of thinking or behaviour that may be causing you difficulties.

CBT can be helpful for people with schizophrenia because it can:

- help you develop coping strategies to deal with the symptoms of psychosis such as hearing voices or delusions
- ease stress so that your symptoms don't get worse
- suggest ways of managing the side effects of medication, such as weight gain
- help you to manage things like social anxiety and depression, which are often associated with schizophrenia.

CBT for psychosis is a bit more complex than regular CBT, because it has to take into account the unusual beliefs and experiences people with schizophrenia might have. (See Mind's booklet Making sense of cognitive behaviour therapy for more information.)

Family intervention therapy 家庭干預治療

If you live with or have regular contact with your family, family intervention therapy can help. The aim of this type of therapy is to help family members develop communication, problem solving, information sharing and coping skills together. The whole family will be able to have a say in how this works, for example it might be done as a group or one-to-one.

Other types of talking treatment

其他類型的談話治療

We know that some people find talking treatments other than CBT and family intervention therapy, such as counselling, supportive psychotherapy and social skills training useful. There is not as much evidence to support these types of therapy for schizophrenia. However, your personal preference should always be taken into account, especially when the other treatments are not available in your area.

Medication

用藥

Doctors usually prescribe antipsychotic drugs (also known as neuroleptic drugs or major tranquillisers) to control the 'positive' symptoms of schizophrenia (see p.5).

Not everybody finds antipsychotics helpful and they can cause unpleasant side effects. If you find the medication helps your symptoms, you may feel it is worth putting up with the side effects, but some people find them harder to cope with than their symptoms and decide to come off them. (See Mind's booklet Making sense of coming off psychiatric drugs for more information.)

Different drugs may affect you in different ways, so you might need to try one or two types before you find the one that suits you best.

How long will I need to take medication?

我需要服藥多久？

Some people get short-term help from medication, then come off it and remain well. Others may benefit from longer-term treatment. If you do stay on medication long term, staying on the lowest effective dose of the drug may be the best way of dealing with symptoms whilst at the same time reducing side effects.

Arts therapies

藝術療法

Arts therapies are a way of using the arts – music, painting, dance, voice or drama – to express and understand yourself in a therapeutic environment with a trained therapist. They can be helpful if you feel distanced from your feelings or find it too upsetting to talk about painful experiences, and would therefore find it difficult to benefit from talking treatments. (See Mind's online booklet Making sense of arts therapies for more information.)

What support services are available?

目前我可以選擇什麼支援服務呢？

As well as receiving treatment, you may find that you need additional support to help you live your day-to-day life. The following range of services is available.

Community care

社區護理

Care in the community is normally split into two categories:

- Health care generally means any care you need to manage your mental or physical health such as medication, therapy or crisis care.
- Social care generally means any care or support you need to manage your day-to-day life as a result of your mental health needs, for example transport, money or employment.

Some services, including voluntary services, allow self-referral, which means you can access them without an assessment and you contact them directly yourself.

Hospital admission

住宿支援服務

There might be times when you feel you need to go into hospital for more intensive treatment. Some people find this helpful as it means they can get the support and care they need to feel better. However, other people find going into a hospital environment upsetting or difficult to cope with.

Advocacy

宣導

An advocate is someone who can both listen to you and speak for you in times of need. They might help you to access the information you need or go with you to meetings or interviews. You might also want them to write letters on your behalf, or speak for you in situations where you don't feel able to speak for yourself. There are lots of different types of advocate. (See Mind's booklet *The Mind guide to advocacy* for more information.)

Physical health checks

身體檢查

The physical health of people with mental health problems such as

schizophrenia is often a lot worse than the rest of the population. They show higher rates of problems like diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity and cardiovascular disease.

This is thought to be due to a combination of factors:

- the side effects of medication (such as weight gain)
- lifestyle factors caused by social isolation and low motivation associated with schizophrenia
- a lower rate of treatment for physical conditions by medical professionals who are focused on the mental rather than physical health of their patients.

Because of this, you should receive annual physical health check-ups from your GP or another medical professional. You should also be able to ask for help with things like giving up smoking or changes to your diet.

How can I help myself?

我該如何自救？

Most people who are diagnosed with schizophrenia are able to live normal and happy lives, even if they continue experiencing symptoms.

“My recovery has been gradual and in stages... No matter how bad I feel, I can now manage my worst days until I get to a better place mentally.”

Below are some suggestions for self-help techniques that you might find useful. You can find more ideas in Mind's booklet *How to improve and maintain your mental wellbeing*.

Look after your physical health 留意身體健康狀況

- Making sure you get enough sleep can make you feel calmer and more able to cope. If you feel tired, you are more likely to feel stressed or worried and find it difficult to manage your symptoms. (See Mind's booklet How to cope with sleep problems for more information.)
- Eating a balanced diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables can help you feel healthier. Eating regularly can also avoid psychosis brought on by significant changes to blood sugar levels. (See Mind's booklet The Mind guide to food and mood for more information.)

Be involved in your treatment 積極參與治療

If you have a mental health problem, being involved in your treatment can help you stay well. Some ways you can do this are by:

- finding out more about your diagnosis and the different treatments available
- asking your doctor to be involved in decisions about your treatment
- making sure you understand any treatment or medication you are prescribed.

You have a right to be given information that you can understand and that is appropriate to your culture and reading ability. If this isn't happening or is proving difficult, an advocate might be helpful (see p.13 and Mind's booklet The Mind guide to advocacy).

Manage your medication

調整藥物劑量

If you are on medication, it is important to learn to manage this in a way that works for you. For example, if your medication makes you feel drowsy, you may want to ask your doctor if you could take it in the evening or you may find that you feel better if you avoid alcohol or certain foods.

If you experience side effects because of your medication, you should discuss this with your GP or psychiatrist. They can help you decide whether to continue taking the medication or change to something else. They should also be able to give you advice about how to manage side effects.

If you want to come off medication, make sure you know all the pros and cons of doing so and how best to do it carefully. Get as much information and support as possible. (See Mind's booklet Making sense of coming off psychiatric drugs for more information.)

Talk to your employer

告訴你的僱主

If you have a job, you may be able to work shorter hours, or to work in a more flexible way. (See Mind's booklet How to be mentally healthy at work for more information.)

Try to minimise stress

盡量減少壓力

Too much stress can make symptoms of schizophrenia worse and increase the chances of you becoming unwell. You may need to reduce the number of responsibilities you have. Or you could try to be aware when things

are getting too much so you can ask for help. You may also find it helpful to learn a relaxation technique to help you cope at times of stress. (See Mind's booklet How to manage stress for more information.)

Do something you enjoy 做自己喜欢的事情

Focus on something practical [like] an allotment. It calms the mind.

Staying involved in the things you enjoy is important. They can improve your confidence and help you stay well – whether it's cooking, seeing your friends or doing DIY. Some people find that doing something creative, such as drama, drawing or sewing, helps them to express themselves positively and deal with any difficult emotions in a positive way.

Use peer support 朋輩支持

Talking to people who have had a similar experience or share similar feelings can be a massive support. Self-help groups provide this opportunity, along with ways of coping and campaigning for better services. For details of organisations that can help you find self-help groups in your area, see 'Useful contacts', on p.21

Maintain your social life

保持社交生活

Feeling connected to other people is an important part of staying well. It can help you to feel valued and confident about yourself, and more able to face difficult times. Think about the interactions you have every day with family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Spending a little more time on relationships you're interested in can really give you a boost. In return, if you are caring and supportive to other people, you are more likely to get a positive response from them.

"I've found the thing that helps me is being around other people, no matter how tiring it is. It forces me to interact and interpret the unpredictability of others in the flesh, instead of listening to people's thoughts."

If you do not have the social contact you feel you need, or experience feelings of loneliness for whatever reason, this can also have a negative impact on your mental wellbeing. (See Mind's booklet *How to cope with loneliness* for more information.)

Learn some mindfulness techniques

學習一些正念技巧

Some people also find mindfulness techniques helpful to manage unwanted or intrusive thoughts and reduce anxiety. Mindfulness is a way of paying attention to the present moment, using techniques like meditation, breathing exercises and yoga.

Plan for a crisis

危機應對計劃

You may want to make a crisis plan or advance statement to tell people what you want to happen if you are in crisis. This can help reduce stress

and address any worries about what will happen to you or your family if you become ill. (See Mind's booklet *The Mind guide to crisis services* for more information.)

Complementary and alternative therapies 其他輔助和替代療法

Some people who are diagnosed with schizophrenia find complementary therapies help them keep on top of their problems. These might include homeopathy and acupuncture. Tai chi, yoga and relaxation techniques can also be of benefit, although it might be a good idea to discuss the possibilities beforehand with a qualified teacher.

What can friends or family do to help?

朋友或家人可以為病人做些什麼呢？

This section is for friends and family who want to support someone they know with a diagnosis of schizophrenia.

As a friend, relative or partner, you can have a vital role in helping someone recover and reducing the likelihood of them having a relapse. However, it can be difficult for you to know how to help sometimes. Lonely, confused, isolated, scared, prejudiced against... [In my experience] that's how family members feel.

Most people want to feel cared about, not to feel alone, and to have someone they can discuss their feelings and options with. It's very important to avoid either blaming them or saying things like "pull yourself together".

Focus on feelings rather than experiences

多留意病人的情緒而非經歷

It can be difficult for you to know how to respond when someone sees something or believes something that you don't.

Rather than confirming or denying their experience, it may help if you say something like, "I accept that you hear voices or see things in that way, but it's not like that for me". It's usually more constructive if you can focus on how the person is feeling, rather than what they are experiencing.

If someone turns round and says to you it's not real, it just makes you feel more alone than ever.

Find out about schizophrenia

了解精神分裂症

This could include learning about the different coping strategies, which your friend or relative might find useful. You may also find it helpful to learn about other people's experiences by reading personal stories, joining support groups or speaking to others in the same situation as you. (See 'Useful contacts' on p.21.)

When the person is feeling well, it's useful to discuss how friends and family can be supportive when and if a crisis occurs. In having this conversation, it can be helpful for friends and family to state clearly what they feel they can and can't deal with.

Ask how you and others can help

直接問問病者你和其他人可以如何提供協助

Ask the person if they would like practical support. This might include helping them find accommodation or access particular services. However if you're acting on their behalf, it's important that you consult them and

don't take over. Alternatively, it may be possible to find an independent advocate to help them. (See 'Advocacy' on p.13 and Mind's booklet The Mind guide to advocacy for more information.)

Help in an emergency

參與急救

If you think your friend or family member could be at risk of hurting themselves or others, it might be necessary to consider a mental health assessment for them. The 'nearest relative' can request that the person at risk be given a mental health assessment by an approved mental health professional. This assessment involves considering treatment options and deciding whether or not the person should be detained (admitted to hospital).

Referring someone for an assessment can be a difficult decision to make, as it can result in someone being detained in hospital against their will. In this situation, there are no right answers. It can help to make sure you are fully informed about the law and what could happen, and perhaps consider talking to other family members before you take this step. (See Mind's Rights guides for more information.)

Get support for yourself

令自己得到支持

It can be distressing when someone you are close to experiences the symptoms of schizophrenia. It's important to get support in coping with your own feelings, which you may find include anger, guilt, fear or frustration.

Useful Contacts

有用連結

The Mental Health Association
of Hong Kong

香港心理衛生會

Tel: 2528 0196

Web: www.mhahk.org.hk

United Centre of Emotional
Health & Positive Living

聯合情緒健康教育中心

Tel: 2349 3212

Web: www.ucep.org.hk

Amity Mutual Support Society

恆康互助社

Tel: 2332 2759

Web: www.amss1996.org.hk

The Samaritan Befrienders
Hong Kong

港撒瑪利亞防止自殺會

Tel: 2389 2222

Web: www.sbhk.org.hk

HK FamilyLink Mental Health
Advocacy Association

香港家連家精神健康倡導協會

Tel: 2144 7244

Web: www.familylink.org.hk

Institute of Mental Health
Castle Peak Hospital

青山醫院精神健康學院

Tel: 2466 7350

Web: www3.ha.org.hk

Further Information

Mind HK was founded and is jointly supported by Mind UK and the Patient Care Foundation. At the moment Mind HK is limited to website support but with donations we hope to expand the work that is done. Volunteers welcome to contact:

mentalhealth@patientcarefoundation.com.hk

Mind Hong Kong 是由 Mind UK 及 Patient Care Foundation Hong Kong 聯合協辦的機構。在現階段我們只能提供有限度的網上支援。假若有足夠的捐款，我們會進一步擴大服務範圍。如有興趣參與義工團隊，請聯絡：mentalhealth@patientcarefoundation.com.hk