

SEX Talks

Schizophrenia

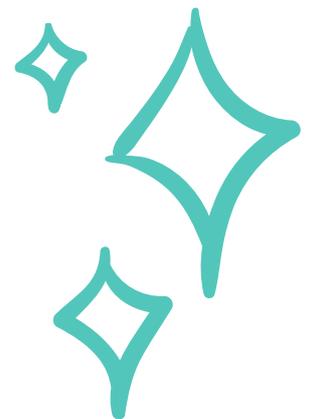


Schizophrenia is a mental disorder that affects how people interact with the world, which also includes relationships. Schizophrenia can alter the way someone sees reality. People with schizophrenia may experience hallucinations, such as seeing or hearing things that do not exist, as well as false beliefs that can be terrifying. Social withdrawal and disturbed thinking rounds out the symptoms for many.

Like many mental illnesses, schizophrenia will affect people in different ways. This resource sheds light on some of the more common ways schizophrenia can affect a person's sexuality and intimate relationships.

Schizophrenia symptoms start typically in the teens or young adult years, just around the time people are navigating relationships and sexuality. Cisgender men typically show symptoms before women do.

Not all health care providers feel comfortable talking about sexual health, but it is a crucial part of your life. It also impacts your treatment. Many mental health medications affect sexual health and cause people to stop taking them, but few people ever bring up the side effects with their health care provider. It's okay to talk about sex! It's crucial to who we are as human beings.



Symptoms and Sexuality

These symptoms may be experienced by some people with schizophrenia.

- Hormonal disturbances, especially at the beginning of the illness, may lead to sexual problems. Estrogen and testosterone may be affected.
- Low self-confidence.
- Few interpersonal relationships.
- Loss of impulse control.
- Social anxiety.
- Social skills deficits.
- Medications used to treat symptoms may cause side effects including difficulty getting aroused, challenges ejaculating, and even reaching orgasm.
- Sedation and weight gain can affect energy and confidence.
- May be more likely to be pressured into sexual activity.
- Cisgender men with schizophrenia may be less likely to use condoms.
- Reduced expression of emotions.
- Reduced feelings of pleasure and fulfillment.
- Cisgender women tend to experience symptoms later in life, which may mean they are more likely to date, have sex, marry, and bear children than men with the condition.
- Low vaginal lubrication may be an issue, requiring artificial lube to keep things pleasurable and comfortable (remember to use only silicon or water-based lubes with condoms).
- People with penises may notice reduced fluid when ejaculating or cumming.
- People with a uterus may be less likely to use contraception. Hormonal birth control can be an issue as well as remembering daily pills. While IUDs may help, some folks may have issues with an object in their uterus. Some folks have had success with injectable contraception (Depo-Provera) although loss of bone density can be a concerning side effect. Talk to your health care provider for your best options.



If you have schizophrenia

While you should feel free to bring up your sexual health with your health care provider, it's understandable that it is difficult. However, you deserve to enjoy your sexuality while maintaining mental wellness. Here are some tips!

- If you start a new medication, note whether you've had any changes in desire, arousal, or having an orgasm. Older anti-psychotic medicines tend to have more side effects than newer ones. If you think your medicine is affecting your sexuality, do not just stop it. Go to your health care provider, though, and see if another medicine might work for you AND have fewer sexual side effects.
- Remember to keep on any treatment your health care providers have given you.
- Communicate honestly and openly with your partner. You and your partner need to know what's expected in the relationship.
- Seek support if you need it, whether that's from a friend or a counsellor.
- If you have lost joy, think about what you used to enjoy, and find ways to get back to that.
- If you have trouble reading social cues, talk to your health care provider about support to learn these.

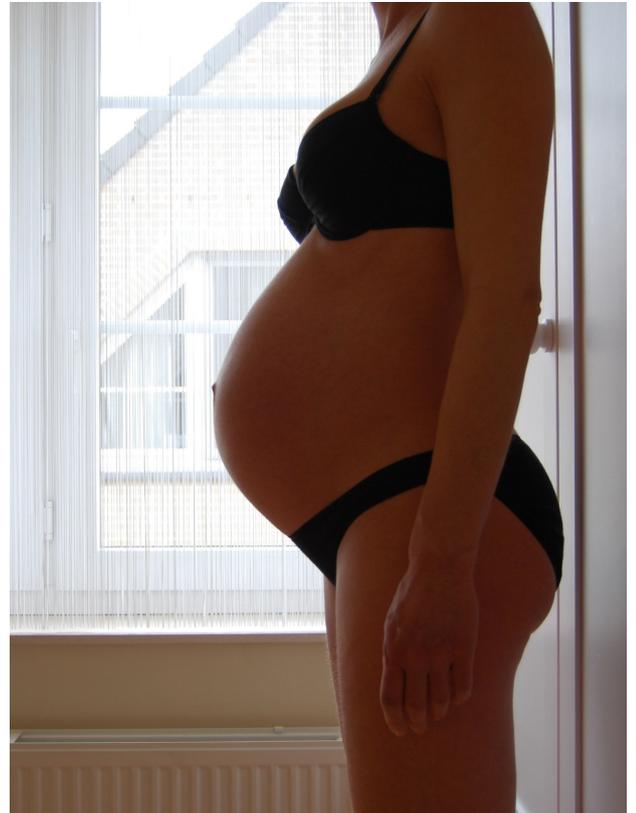
One of the main reasons people stop taking their medicine?

*Sexual side effects!
Don't be afraid to bring the topic up with your health care provider.*



Pregnancy and Childbirth

- Some folks with schizophrenia have issues conceiving.
- While pregnant, some people may experience worse symptoms, especially if the pregnancy is unplanned.
- People with schizophrenia tend to experience more violence, which makes their pregnancies high risk.
- During pregnancy, some people may be more likely to smoke or use other substances, and may face risks from them.
- If someone is pregnant, it is important to review the risks and benefits of any medication they are taking. Most importantly, no one should stop their medication upon seeing a positive pregnancy test. Talk to your health care provider immediately, but keep taking your prescriptions.
- Sedation at night may make it difficult to hear the baby, so it's important to have a plan.
- Schizophrenia may worsen in the six months after giving birth. Seeking help can be difficult because people can worry about losing custody of their baby. Some folks with mental illness may not even recognize they need help. That's why it's great to have a supporter who can let you know you need support.



Got a sexual health question? You deserve information from your health care provider. Ask away.

References

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Resources

The Mighty at themighty.com

Healthy Place for your Mental Health at healthyplace.com

Sex Info Online at <http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/sexinfo/home>

The info in this resource is not meant to replace trusted advice from a health care professional.

However, use it as a jumping off point for talking about your mental health and sexuality, which are both important.



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