



Your Health

Mental Health: Alzheimer's, Schizophrenia, and Depression©

by Jack Grierson

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Mental disorders are often a taboo discussion topic as many people shy away from either the admission of having one or having to support someone with a mental condition. Unfortunately, mental disorders are on the rise, especially as we develop more and more medication that extends the human lifespan. We may be able to fix our bodies to enable us to live longer – but preventing the degradation of our mental state as we age is proving to be a much greater challenge.

The first mental disorder we'll talk about is one of the most common. As mentioned earlier, the risk of mental disorders increases as we age, with the most prominent elderly disorder being Dementia.

Dementia is not a specific disease but a broad range of symptoms that are associated with memory loss and the inability to effectively communicate anymore. The definition of Dementia is a relatively broad one – the Alzheimer's association defines it as 'a general term for a decline in mental ability severe enough to interfere with daily life'. 60 to 80 percent of Dementia is caused by Alzheimer's disease. It's worth noting that Alzheimer's is not a normal part of aging despite the risk going up as we get older. Unfortunately, Alzheimer's is a progressive disease which means that it steadily gets worse over time. During the end stages of the disease, the person can die due to pneumonia, dehydration, malnutrition or accidents as the disease eventually causes diminished motor function. Although there isn't a cure yet, many pharmaceutical companies are investing in Alzheimer's Research & Development to potentially come up with an effective drug. A recent article was published describing the effect of Ultrasound on the brain. Apparently the ultrasound waves can break up brain plaques. (These are abnormal protein clusters that can cause your brain to malfunction).

Our second mental disorder is Schizophrenia. It is characterized by abnormalities in at least 1 of these categories: Delusions, Hallucinations, Disorganized thinking or speech and grossly disorganized or abnormal behavior. About 20% of Schizophrenics attempt suicide on 1 or more occasions. It is a chronic and severe mental disorder that affects how a person thinks, feels and behaves. People with Schizophrenia may seem like they've lost touch with reality. It's known that Schizophrenia runs in families as it has a genetic link. We have also discovered that Schizophrenics have a different brain chemistry and structure which can trigger psychotic symptoms. Nowadays Schizophrenia is often successfully managed when patients take anti-psychotics although this can pose a problem as very often the individual won't stay on the drug regimen. As Schizophrenics are often paranoid, many people suffering from this

condition think that the drugs are part of a governmental scheme or part of another threatening backstory. This isn't surprising as anti-psychotics can dull the senses and make you sleepy, which makes the patient feel as if they are being controlled. Having said that, many people have found success in the current treatments for Schizophrenia and drug companies are working on fixing the unwanted side effects.

Our last mental disorder is unfortunately very common and afflicts around 350 million people around the world according to the World Health Organization. More women are affected by depression than men and at worst, depression can lead to suicide. However, fear not! There are many treatments available for depression, both in terms of medication and in terms of life style changes. Clinical depression is a type of depression caused by an imbalance of serotonin in your brain. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that causes the feelings of happiness and wellness, so a lack of this can make you feel depressed. Luckily antidepressants work on increasing the levels of Serotonin in the brain to make you feel less depressed. A non-medicated and highly successful treatment for depression is a type of psychotherapy called CBT or Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. This can also be used in combination with antidepressants. CBT works on getting in touch with your feelings, thoughts and behaviors to figure out why you might feel or act a certain way and how to deal with it effectively.

This week's advice: Just because someone may show symptoms of memory loss issues – it doesn't mean they have Alzheimer's or Dementia. There are many different causes of memory problems – it could even be something as benign as a vitamin B12 deficiency which is very easily treated. Finally, if you or someone you know is suffering from depression - take comfort in that you are not alone and that admitting you need help is the first step to recovery.

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