

# Schizoaffective Disorder

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 [mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/schizoaffective-disorder](https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/schizoaffective-disorder)

Schizoaffective disorder is characterized by persistent symptoms of psychosis resembling schizophrenia with additional periodic symptoms of mood (or affective) disorders.

## Symptoms of Schizoaffective Disorder

The following are symptoms that a person with Schizoaffective Disorder can experience.

### Symptoms of depression:

- Feel constantly sad and fatigued
- Have lost interest in everyday activities
- Are indecisive and unable to concentrate
- Sleep and eat too little or too much
- Complain of various physical symptoms
- May have recurrent thoughts of death and suicide

### Symptoms of mania:

- Suffering from sleeplessness
- Compulsively talkative
- Agitated and distractible
- Convinced of their own inflated importance
- Susceptible to buying sprees
- Prone to cheerfulness turning to irritability
- Indiscreet sexual advances, and foolish investments
- Paranoia, and rage

### Symptoms of psychosis:

- Hearing or seeing things that aren't there
- Bizarre thinking
- Difficulty with emotions or appearing apathetic
- Changes in speech
- Have confused thinking
- Paranoia
- Strange or out of character behavior
- And inappropriate emotional reactions

## Difficulty In Distinguishing Illnesses

Schizoaffective Disorder is often confused with Bipolar Disorder with psychotic features. Both diagnosis include mood changes that impact life as well as symptoms of psychosis. A person diagnosed with Schizoaffective Disorder primarily experiences symptoms of psychosis even if mood problems don't exist. However, when mood problems flare up, such as during a depressed or manic episode, the symptoms of psychosis can worsen. Someone who is diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder with psychotic features often only experiences psychosis during a mood swing.

This distinction is not always as obvious as the description suggests. Emotion and behavior are more fluid and less easy to classify than physical symptoms. If you're not sure about your diagnosis, it's a great question to bring up with your therapist, doctor or support person. A mental health professional can help provide education and clarify issues to make sure you understand your options including treatment.

## How is Schizoaffective Disorder Treated?

If a person is experiencing psychosis, a neuroleptic (antipsychotic) drug is most often used, since antidepressants and lithium (used for bipolar disorder) take several weeks to start working. Antipsychotic medications should help resolve symptoms quickly, sometimes as quickly as 3-5 days. Long term use of older antipsychotic drugs have been known to cause tardive dyskinesia, a serious and sometimes irreversible disorder of body movement. After symptoms of psychosis improve, mood symptoms may be treated with antidepressants, lithium, anticonvulsants, or electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). Sometimes a neuroleptic is combined with lithium or an antidepressant and then gradually withdrawn, to be restored if necessary. The few studies on drug treatment of this disorder suggest that antipsychotic drugs are most effective. The greater effectiveness of these new drugs may be partly due to their activity at receptors for the neurotransmitter serotonin, which is not influenced as strongly by standard antipsychotic drugs.

Outside of medications, finding help through counseling, family therapy, case management, peer supports, or other enhanced services like supported employment, supported education, or supported housing is very helpful. Mood problems and psychosis are likely to increase with stress and lack of sleep. Supports can help to reduce stress, problem solve, provide additional resources and education and help understand how best to recover from mental health problems. For Schizoaffective Disorder, combining therapy and medication treatments will increase chances of recovery. Having access to various types of treatment might depend on where you live. To get more information about treatment, visit our [Finding Help](#) page.

## Other Resources

### The Brain and Behavior Research Foundation

1-800-829-8289

<https://bbrfoundation.org>

### National Institute of Mental Health Public Information and Communications Branch

1-866-615-6464

[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

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