VALLEYHEALTH

Understanding Schizoaffective Disorder

Schizoaffective disorder is a serious mental health condition that combines symptoms of schizophrenia and mood disorders like depression or bipolar disorder. With the right treatment and support, people can manage symptoms and live well.

What is Schizoaffective Disorder?

Schizoaffective disorder includes:

- **Mood symptoms** like depression or mania (feeling “up” or overly excited)
- **Psychosis symptoms** like delusions (false beliefs) or hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren’t there)

These symptoms can happen together or separately. Some people may have hallucinations even when their mood seems normal.

Common Signs to Watch For

Family and friends might notice changes in behavior such as:

- Big shifts in mood
- Talking very fast or not making sense
- Trouble sleeping or staying focused
- Seeing or hearing things that others don’t
- Believing things that aren’t true
- Withdrawing from others

If you notice these changes, it’s important to seek help right away.

What Causes Schizoaffective Disorder?

The exact cause isn’t known, but several factors may play a role:

- **Family history** of mental illness
- **Chemical imbalances** in the brain
- **Stress or trauma**
- **Substance use** (especially in those with genetic risk)

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How is it Diagnosed?

This disorder can be hard to diagnose. Doctors look at:

- A person's pattern of symptoms over time
- Whether psychosis happens only during mood episodes or continues in between

Sometimes, doctors may talk to family members to get a clearer picture.

How is it Treated?

Treatment usually involves a combination of:

- **Medication:** Antipsychotics for psychosis, mood stabilizers or antidepressants for mood symptoms
- **Therapy:** Helps people understand their condition, manage stress, and build routines
- **Healthy habits:** Exercise, nutrition, and sleep all play a role in recovery

Medication Side Effects

Certain medications may cause some people to experience:

- Weight gain
- Tremors (shaking in hands or face)
- Fatigue or dizziness

Doctors will help find the best medicine with the fewest side effects. Nutrition, movement, and regular check-ins can help reduce risks.

Valley Health offers mental health care that's grounded in compassion and backed by experience. If you or a loved one is showing signs of schizoaffective disorder, we're here to support you.

Visit Valleyhealth.org to learn more about treatment options.