

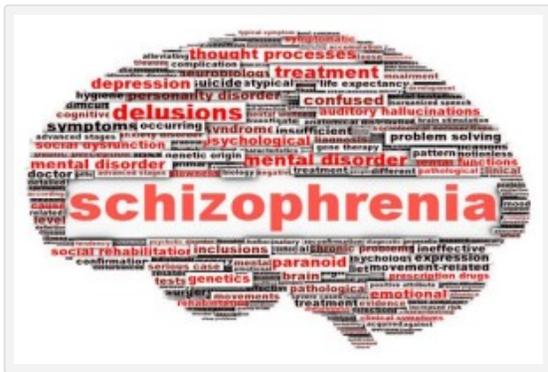
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Mental Health Spotlight: Living with Schizophrenia

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By Kristen M. Leccese



All too often, it's a difficult task to deal with aspects of our lives that we can't control – office rules, orders from the boss, law enforcement, and more. But what happens when those voices that tell you what to do are inside your own head? How do you deal with it, and how do you escape?

Paranoid schizophrenia is a lifelong, chronic mental illness. There are several variations of schizophrenia, but paranoid schizophrenia is particularly challenging. Paranoid schizophrenia comes along with severe delusions and hallucinations, making it incredibly difficult to deal with on a daily basis. What's more, these delusions may seem so genuine to the victim that they neglect to seek help because they truly believe what they're experiencing is real.

Today, we're speaking with 25 year old Kyle*, who was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia at age 21. He gives us a peek into his mind, his world, and how he manages his everyday life

with this serious chronic condition.

When did you start to notice that something wasn't right?

I'd say around senior year of high school, but I didn't really accept the diagnosis until recently. I honestly couldn't tell that there was anything wrong with me at first. I stormed out of the doctor's office when I heard the diagnosis ... I actually did not agree with it completely until this year.

Were there any particular events that triggered your symptoms originally?

I was working at the World Trade Center site ... that's when I really lost it. We were going through toxic waste, metals and the like. I stopped eating, lost a lot of weight, wouldn't cut my hair or shave – I basically worked myself to a psychotic breakdown. My mind was so caught up in the tragedy that I ignored the symptoms of my illness.

When were you first hospitalized for your condition?

The symptoms were clear to everyone but me. So my mom, dad, aunt and uncle all got together and tried to convince me to go to the hospital. They called the police for an ambulance and I refused to go; I wouldn't commit myself. They had to take me against my will. They actually threatened me and used mace just to get me into the ambulance. That whole time, I still didn't think there was anything wrong with me.

What kind of symptoms did you experience?

I stopped eating, I stopped sleeping. I had delusional and psychotic thoughts. Total irrationality. Sometimes I still feel like it could all be a dream, and I'll wake up still a kid when none of this stuff was as bad as it is now. The delusions come from hearing noises, paranoia, and

PTSD from working at the WTC site.

Do you hear the voices? What's that like for you?

I do. It feels like I'm in a coma, and I'll start to hear the voices talking. It's as if I'm living a dream even though I'm wide awake.

Do the voices talk to you directly, to each other, or both?

Indirectly. Usually it's just someone talking, but I freak out because I don't know who it is that's talking. Sometimes the talking has something to do with me, like I did something wrong. It's tough to confront. I can't even really confront it, because it's not real. But to me it is.

Have you been hospitalized since the first episode?

Yes, four times. The second time I checked myself in, the next two times my mom called the police, and the most recent time I called myself. I started to notice the symptoms, so after going seven days without any sleep I called the ambulance on my own. It's the drilling noise that gets me. When I was working down at the trade center, I was drilling in a remaining basement garage. And I always hear the drilling, even now.

How do you deal with all this on a daily basis?

I take the medication. It helps, but it also makes some things worse. The pros are that they relax me, they numb the paranoia and give me my appetite back. The bad part is I get some pretty bad physical side effects. It's up or down ... sometimes I feel like I need the medication; sometimes I feel like I'm okay without it. But the doctors definitely prefer me to be on the meds.

What advice would you give others out there suffering from the same illness?

Try to keep control, and be patient.

***Name has been changed for privacy.**

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