

## Should family-based care be used for people with schizophrenia?

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**Clinical Question** Are family-based interventions effective and safe, for people with schizophrenia and their families, compared to standard care?

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**Bottom Line** Family-based interventions may reduce the risk of relapse for people with schizophrenia by 34% at short-term follow-up, though the effect may not last long term. These interventions likely reduce caregiver burden and increase family members' ability to shift from high to low expressed emotion. They might reduce hospital days in the short and medium term, but their impact on overall hospital admissions is uncertain. Family-based interventions can improve patients' mental state, particularly positive symptoms and insight, and may increase functioning in the short and long term, but their effect on social functioning is minimal.

For family members, these interventions likely improve social support and family functioning in the short term and may enhance caregiving competence.

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**Caveat** The majority of patients in most studies ranged from 25 years to 40 years, with an average illness history of 2.5 years to 13 years. Most included studies were conducted in outpatient or community settings by mental health nurses, psychiatrists or psychologists.

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**Context** Schizophrenia is a severe, chronic mental illness affecting around 20 million people globally. Onset typically occurs between 18 and 24 years. The illness often leads to long-term impairments in social, cognitive, and occupational functioning, and is a leading cause of disability worldwide. Antipsychotic medications, the primary treatment, are effective for managing positive symptoms but less so for negative and cognitive symptoms. Family interactions, especially in high-stress environments, can increase the risk of relapse. Family-based interventions, which improve understanding and relationships, have been recommended to enhance care quality and reduce the burden on both patients and families. However, few individuals refuse family involvement in their care.

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**Cochrane Systematic Review** Chien WT, Ma DC, Bressington D, Mou H. Family-based interventions versus standard care for people with schizophrenia. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2024, Issue 10. Art. No.: CD013541. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD013541.pub2. This review contains 26 trials which included 1985 people.

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**Pearls No. 757, October 2024, written by Assoc Professor Vanessa MB Jordan.**

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Systematic review link:

<https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD013541.pub2/full>