

Virtual Hallucinations

Fact Sheet

What is it?

- Virtual Hallucinations offers people a chance to understand what it feels and sounds like to have schizophrenia.
- Wearing goggles and earphones created using advanced, virtual-reality technology, a person can see and hear a simulation of various types of hallucinations that someone with schizophrenia may experience. This interactive tool allows the participant to control this simulation, responding to visual auditory markers, thus creating a unique experience.
- Hallucinations are some of the most flagrant and disruptive symptoms that people with schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders can experience. Approximately 70-75% of people with schizophrenia experience auditory hallucinations (e.g., hearing voices) and 15% experience visual illusions or distortions.¹

How was it created?

- Using input from individuals with the disease and a panel of expert psychiatrists, Virtual Hallucinations was originally created as a cassette tape that simulated auditory hallucinations. As technology advanced, Janssen, L.P. wanted to be able to also simulate visual hallucinations. Partnering with élan Communications, they were able to develop a software program to create the realism and range of images that consumers with psychotic symptoms actually experience. Virtual Hallucinations is now in its third edition, each more realistic than its predecessor.
- The lightweight earphone-and-goggles-unit, complete with full-motion tracking capabilities, a 360-degree field of vision and surround sound, operate off a customized computer system.
- Virtual Hallucinations is now available in portable versions via a laptop computer that is custom fit inside a briefcase.

Who is it for?

- An invaluable teaching aid for students, physicians and the public, the simulation has the potential to create empathy for a frightening condition that most people can barely imagine.
- The implications of this technology are endless in affecting those who come in contact with or relate to those with schizophrenia – friends and families of those afflicted, health professionals, legislators and law enforcement.

How do you use it?

- Looking into the goggles, you should hear a brief introduction. When the pharmacist asks, “How can I help you?” you should reply, “I lost my medication a couple of weeks ago and I need to get my refill.”
- Throughout the simulation, you should continue to interact and answer questions while responding to any sounds and looking in the direction from which they come.

This experience simulates a severe episode of auditory and visual hallucinations and may be disturbing to some people. If you anticipate being disturbed by it, become so during its viewing or believe it will disturb you after viewing, you should consider not participating or immediately discontinue viewing if you become uncomfortable during the experience. We appreciate your interest in learning more about schizophrenia.

¹ Mueser KT, Bellack AS, Brady EU. Hallucinations in schizophrenia. *Acta Psychiatr Scand.* 1990; 82:26-29.