

Early Psychosis



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What is psychosis?

- Psychosis is a serious medical condition that affects the brain.
- During an episode of psychosis, changes in your brain affect the messages between different areas of the brain. This can make it hard for you to tell what is real and what is not.

What causes psychosis?

- Psychosis can happen to anyone.
- There is no single cause of psychosis. It is often caused by a combination of:
 - › biological (passed on in families) factors.
 - › environmental (affected by your environment or lifestyle) factors.
- You are more likely to develop psychosis if your parent or sibling has it. However, there may not be a family history.
- You are at a higher risk of developing psychosis if you use cannabis, stimulants or hallucinogens (like cocaine, ecstasy, LSD, etc.) regularly.

What are the signs of psychosis?

- › Withdrawal from family and friends
- › Loss of interest in your usual activities
- › Loss of energy and motivation
- › Problems with memory and concentration
- › High levels of suspicion, tension, or irritability
- › Trouble sleeping, restlessness, pacing at night
- › Hearing or seeing things that are not there
- › Confused speech or trouble communicating
- › Bizarre or unusual behaviour
- › Lack of emotional response or inappropriate emotions

How is psychosis treated?

- Antipsychotic medications are often used to treat psychosis.
- **Most people with psychosis recover.** Some symptoms may go away quickly, but recovery usually happens slowly over time. Each person's recovery is different.
- Some people may continue to experience symptoms or have episodes of psychosis (relapses).
- Some people may experience psychosis as a long-term illness. They can manage their symptoms, similarly to diabetes or asthma.

What can I expect if I have psychosis?

- A clinician (nurse, psychiatrist, social worker, psychologist etc.) will meet with you to ask you about your experience. They may help you fill out questionnaires. They will:
 - › help you learn about psychosis, recovery, and staying well.
 - › work with you to develop a treatment and recovery plan.
- Your clinician will meet with you regularly to:
 - › find out how you are doing.
 - › track your progress.
 - › adjust your treatment plan, as needed.
- Your clinician may connect you with other health care team members and services, as needed.

What can I do to help my loved one?

- It is not your fault that your loved one is experiencing psychosis. Learning about psychosis can help you understand what they may be going through and why they may be acting differently. It can help you feel more prepared to support them.
- You are an important part of your loved one's treatment and recovery. It is also important to take care of yourself. Keep doing your usual activities and practice self-care. Examples of self-care include: eating healthy foods, exercising regularly, getting a good night's sleep, visiting with friends, etc. Ask the clinician what supports are offered for loved ones.
- If you would like to learn more about how to support your loved one, please ask the health care team.

Early Psychosis Intervention Services

Central Intake (19 years and older)

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-855-922-1122
 - Option 1 – Western Zone (Annapolis Valley, South Shore, Southwest)
 - Option 2 – Northern Zone (Colchester, East Hants, Cumberland, Pictou)
 - Option 3 – Eastern Zone (Cape Breton, Guysborough, Antigonish)
 - Option 4 – Central Zone (Halifax Regional Municipality, West Hants)

IWK Central Intake (up to 19 years old)

- › Phone: 902-464-4110

Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-888-429-8167

Common terms

Antipsychotic: A type of medication used to treat psychosis.

Delusions: Fixed beliefs that are not real.

Depot/Long-acting injection (LAI): A long-acting form of antipsychotic medication. It is injected into a muscle using a needle.

Dopamine: A neurotransmitter (chemical) in the brain. Antipsychotic medications slow down dopamine's ability to send messages between nerve cells in the brain.

Hallucinations: Unusual perceptions (what you think you see, feel, and hear) (for example, hearing voices that are not there).

Medication adherence: Taking your medication as prescribed.

Negative symptoms: Experiences that should be present, but are missing (for example, lack of energy or motivation, dull emotions).

Neurotransmitter: A chemical that sends a message between nerve cells in the brain. Two neurotransmitters that are important in treating psychosis are dopamine and serotonin.

Oral medication: Medication that is taken by mouth.

Positive symptoms: Experiences that should not be present (for example, hallucinations and delusions).

Prodrome: The first phase of a psychotic episode. The early warning signs are unclear and hard to notice. There may be changes in the way you describe your feelings, thoughts, and perceptions.

Relapse: When previously treated psychotic symptoms happen again.

Remission: When symptoms have improved so that they no longer have a big effect on your life.

Recovery: An ongoing process that involves gaining control of your life, setting and achieving goals, developing skills, and fulfilling dreams.

Schizoaffective disorder: A disorder in which you have symptoms of both a mood disorder (like depression or bipolar illness) and schizophrenia.

Schizophrenia: A psychotic illness in which changes in behaviour or symptoms last for at least 6 months. Symptoms and length of illness will be different for each person. Many people with schizophrenia make a full recovery.

Schizophreniform disorder: Similar to schizophrenia, but symptoms last for less than 6 months.

Schizophreniform disorder: A type of psychosis that happens when you start or stop substance use (like alcohol or drugs).

Resources

Because Your Mind Matters

Information for youth and young adults on psychosis, how to get support, and ways to manage and prevent relapse

- › <https://becauseyourmindmatters.ca/>

Canadian Consortium for Early Intervention in Psychosis

- › www.cceip.ca

Canadian Mental Health Association, Nova Scotia Branch

Education programs and support groups

- › www.novascotia.cmha.ca
- › Phone: 902-466-6600

Cannabis & Psychosis

Information for youth, young adults, and families about cannabis and psychosis

- › www.cannabisandpsychosis.ca

Caring for Carers

Information and support for loved ones and links to online education sessions

- › <http://caringforcarers.ca/en/>

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

- › www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/psychosis

Resources include a free, 6-module, self-paced, online course called “Empowering Families Affected by Psychosis”:

- › <https://moodle8.camhx.ca/moodle/course/view.php?id=16>

Living Well with Schizophrenia

A YouTube channel by Lauren, who lives with schizoaffective disorder

- › www.youtube.com/c/LivingWellwithSchizophrenia

Nova Scotia Health – Mental Health and Addictions Hub

Information about services, and online mental health and addictions tools

- › <https://mha.nshealth.ca/en>

Psychosis 101

Information for youth, young adults, and families on detection, treatment, management, and support. Includes stories and videos from people experiencing psychosis.

- › <http://psychosis101.ca/>

Schizophrenia Society of Nova Scotia

One-on-one peer support, family education, and support groups

- › www.ssns.ca
- › Phone: 902-465-2601

Understanding Voices

Information for people who hear voices and their support persons

- › <https://understandingvoices.com/>

