

Psychotic illness

Psychotic disorders are a group of illnesses that affect how a person thinks, feels and behaves. During a period of psychosis, a person may experience a disruption in their thoughts and perceptions. They may also have difficulty determining what is real and what isn't.

Around three in every 100 people will experience a psychotic episode at some point in their lifetime.



What causes psychosis?

There is no one specific cause of psychosis. A psychotic episode may be the result of a particular event, or may be caused by a mental illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or severe depression.

Psychosis can also be triggered by drug use, including cannabis, amphetamines, LSD, ketamine or cocaine. In some cases, genetic factors can contribute to psychotic illness. Those with a family history of psychotic disorders may have an increased chance of developing psychosis.

Supporting someone with psychosis

If someone you know is showing signs of psychosis, it is important to seek help. Early treatment is likely to improve recovery outcomes. The first step might be to seek a diagnosis from a doctor or mental health professional. You can also offer to take the person to a hospital for treatment and care. Sometimes, more urgent support may be necessary. If the person appears at risk of harming themselves or others, call 000.

Psychosis often develops in adolescence or early adulthood. It can be difficult to recognise whether psychosis is present, especially in its early stages, but timely intervention is important for recovery.

With appropriate treatment, a person with a psychotic disorder can recover and lead a normal, healthy life.

The signs and symptoms

A person will generally show changes in their behaviour before psychosis develops. During a psychotic episode, there are certain symptoms a person may exhibit. Symptoms can vary from person to person, and from episode to episode.

Disordered behaviour:

- Becoming agitated or childlike
- Withdrawing socially
- Decline in self-care or hygiene
- Confused speech or trouble communicating

Disordered thinking:

- Trouble concentrating
- Difficulty remembering things
- Speech slowing down or speeding up

Delusions:

- The person might hold beliefs that are unusual or untrue. Delusions can take difficult forms, including paranoia or persecutory delusions, grandiosity or depressive.

Hallucinations:

- A person might hear, see, smell or taste things that do not exist.

STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING PSYCHOTIC ILLNESSES

1

Medicine.

A person with psychosis may be prescribed antipsychotic medicines. While these medicines can take several weeks to reduce symptoms like hallucinations or disordered thinking, they do provide more immediate calming effects that help with sleep.

2

Psychological therapy.

Psychological treatments such as supportive psychotherapy, cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) or group therapy can all assist people who are experiencing psychosis.

3

Family support and education.

Family members are often among the first to notice signs of a psychotic illness. Providing families with knowledge and coping skills means they are better equipped to support loved ones living with psychosis.

4

Community support.

People with psychosis may require practical support. Mental health services, for instance, can help connect people with social support networks. Support programs can also help people with stable accommodation, financial security and, in some cases, assistance to find suitable work.