

Psychosis

What is Psychosis?

Psychosis is a mental state in which people experience altered thinking or altered experiences compared to those around them. The main symptoms are:

- Hallucinations:
- Delusions:
- Confused/disturbed thinking

Hallucinations: Most commonly hearing or seeing things that don't exist but sometimes hallucinations can involve taste and smell. An example of a hallucinations is seeing or hearing people that aren't actually there. Psychotic symptoms like voices or odd beliefs are usually so realistic and convincing to the person experiencing them that they have trouble accepting that they may not be correct or based in reality.

Delusions: Fixed beliefs in something which is not actually true. Sometimes people have beliefs that they have a certain power or strength, for example that they are the Prime Minister. Sometimes the beliefs can be distressing, for example that people want to hurt or kill them.

Confused/disturbed thinking: People's thought patterns can be affected by psychosis. This can be related to delusions and hallucinations or it can involve rapid/racing speech, sudden loss of train of

thought or rapidly changing thoughts or speech.

Although the person themselves might be experiencing all these symptoms. It may not be clear to other people what is going on. People with psychosis may just seem to behave 'oddly' or express unusual beliefs.

What causes Psychosis?

Psychosis is a very broad 'umbrella' term for a variety of experiences, and one person's experience of psychosis can be very different from another's. Psychosis is usually caused by a combination of several factors coming together.

While anyone can experience psychosis, certain things can make a person more prone to psychosis as opposed to other mental health problems.

Some people are more prone to schizophrenia because of their genetics although even having a close relative with schizophrenia does not mean that relatives will definitely develop the illness.

A variety of difficult early life experiences can also make a person prone to psychosis such as childhood bullying, physical or sexual abuse, neglect, and social and economic deprivation.

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Psychosis tends to then be triggered by physical or emotional stressors such as a lack of sleep or recreational drug use, a sudden loss as in a bereavement or losing a job, or overwhelming experiences such as starting college or a break up of a relationship.

As many as 3.4% of the population will experience psychosis, with schizophrenia and the spectrum of 'non-affective' psychosis having a lifetime risk of approaching 1%. Psychosis affects men and women, and can occur at any age, although it is more common in adolescence and early adulthood.

Treatment

Treatment for psychosis involves support from a mental health team made up of a variety of professionals including psychiatrists, nurses, social workers, psychologists and others. Different members of the team can offer support tailored to the needs of each individual including:

Medication: The main medications used are 'antipsychotic medications'. Sometimes other medications will be used to treat problems associated with psychosis such as sleep problems, depression and anxiety.

Psychological therapy: Psychological therapies help a person cope with distressing psychotic experiences and also manage stress as this places a key role in psychosis.

Psychological therapies also help the person to make sense of their experiences and why they might have developed. This then helps to identify and address any factors that made the person prone to psychosis and work on those, for example through trauma work.

Social and Vocational activities: Supporting a person to gradually return to work or studies, and gaining confidence to socialise with family and friends is important.

Lifestyle changes: Learning to manage stress, eating healthily, and doing activities that improve well-being are very important to recovery. Reducing unhelpful behaviours such as taking drugs or drinking alcohol excessively is also important in staying well.

Treatment is usually given without having to go to hospital, but sometimes when people are very unwell they are offered hospital to make sure they can receive treatment in a safe environment.

Family/Carer support

Watching a loved one experience psychosis can be stressful and very upsetting for families/carers.

Team members can offer information about psychosis and practical advice and support to families/carers.

Family therapy is also very helpful in supporting the whole family to understand and work together to manage the difficulties associated with the person's psychosis.

More information and Support

If you think you may be experiencing psychosis or you are worried about a friend or relative, you can contact the **Early Intervention in Psychosis Service** directly (**East 01208 834276 / West 01209 888888**), or contact your GP who can refer on to the Early Intervention Team.

If you think a person is posing an **imminent danger to themselves or others call 999**.

Mindcast podcast

Listen to this podcast to hear about one patient's personal experience of Psychosis.

<https://soundcloud.com/mindcharity/mindcast-psychosis>

Hearing Voices network

Information and support for people who hear voices.

<https://www.hearing-voices.org/>

First Aid for Psychosis

How to deal with someone you know who is experiencing symptoms of Psychosis.

<https://mindhacks.com/2007/09/12/learn-first-aid-for-psychosis/>

Rethink Mental Illness

A charity providing advice, information and support for people affected by mental illness.

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