



People with psychosis have problems in the way they interpret the real world, and usually have symptoms that affect their beliefs, thoughts, feelings and behaviour.



Psychosis causes people to misinterpret or confuse what is going on around them. For example, they may have hallucinations (in which they see or hear things that are not real) or delusions (fixed, but false, beliefs). A first episode of psychosis is most likely to happen in late adolescence or in the early adult years. It is often frightening for the person and misunderstood by others, but psychosis can be treated and most people make a full recovery. Without treatment, psychosis can seriously disrupt your life and development, so it's important to get early help.

What are the symptoms of psychosis?

Confused thinking: Everyday thoughts can become confused, making sentences unclear or hard to understand. You might have difficulty concentrating, following a conversation or remembering things. Thoughts can seem to speed up or slow down.

False beliefs (delusions): You strongly believe something is real, but is not. For example, you may believe the way that cars are parked outside the house shows you are being watched by the police.

Hallucinations: You can see, hear, feel, smell or taste something that is not actually there.

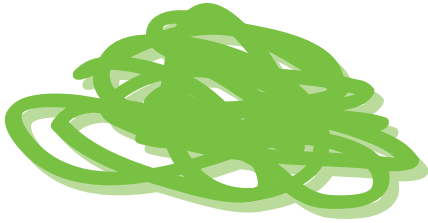
Changed feelings: How you feel can change for no obvious reason. You might feel strange and cut off from the world, with everything moving in slow motion. Mood swings are common, and you might feel unusually excited or depressed. You may seem to feel less emotion, or show less emotion to those around them.

Changed behaviour: You may be extremely active or have difficulty getting the energy to do things, laugh when things don't seem funny, or become angry or upset without any cause.

What are the types of psychosis?

Psychosis can occur in a number of mental illnesses. Some possibilities include:

- **Drug-induced psychosis:** Using or withdrawing from drugs, especially cannabis and amphetamines, can cause psychotic symptoms that last for short or long periods.
- **Brief reactive psychosis:** Psychotic symptoms appear suddenly after a major stress in the person's life. Recovery is often quick.
- **Schizophrenia:** An illness in which the symptoms have continued for at least six months. Many people with schizophrenia lead happy and fulfilling lives, and many make a full recovery.
- **Bipolar disorder:** People can experience psychotic symptoms as part of this disorder (see www.headspace.org.au).
- **Psychotic depression:** Psychotic symptoms can occur in people with very severe depression.



What causes psychosis?

Like lots of illnesses, psychosis is probably caused by a combination of your genes (inherited from parents) and the things you are exposed to in your life (your environment, which might include stress, drug use or severe social changes).



How do I get help?

Try to seek help as soon as possible if you have symptoms of psychosis. Tell someone you trust such as a parent, teacher or friend if you are having some strange experiences that you cannot explain.

Safe and effective treatment for psychosis is easily available. The earlier you seek help, the better the results and the quicker your recovery. General practitioners (GPs) and clinicians at your local mental health service will be able to provide the help you need.



How is psychosis treated?

Treatments usually involve medication, education about the illness, counselling, family support and practical support (such as helping you get back to school or work). Avoiding drugs, reducing stress and learning ways to cope with stress can help prevent the symptoms from returning in the future.

How do I help someone else cope with psychosis?

Try to be calm and supportive as it can be frightening and confusing to experience psychosis. If you are worried about a friend or family member, seek help from your GP or local mental health service, and encourage the young person to get professional treatment as early as possible.

Practical help can assist a person to stay safe and feel secure. This might mean helping them to pay bills or rent, or getting them to medical appointments.

If someone is suggesting they will harm themselves, call your mental health service or hospital to arrange urgent specialist attention. Remember the person may be responding to things that are real to them but do not make sense to you. There are support groups for family and friends of people with psychosis.

For more information, and to find out how to get help, visit the headspace website: www.headspace.org.au