



the facts:  
mental health challenges



headspace  
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

# understanding psychosis

**Psychosis is an experience where a person has difficulties interpreting the real world. They might see or hear things that other people can't or have unusual ideas or beliefs. This can affect their thoughts, feelings and behaviour.**

Psychosis is often frightening for the person going through it and misunderstood by those around them. However, it can be treated. Most people who experience psychosis make a good recovery and go on to lead healthy, productive lives.

## What are the symptoms of psychosis?

### Changed behaviour

Behaving differently from how they usually do. For example, extremely active or having little energy; laughing when things don't seem funny or becoming angry or upset without any obvious reason.

### Changed emotions

Feeling strange and cut off from the world; feeling less emotion or showing less emotion than those around them.

### Confused thinking

Everyday thoughts can become confused, making sentences unclear or hard to understand. It can be hard to concentrate, follow a conversation or remember things. Thoughts can seem to speed up or slow down.

### False beliefs (delusions)

Strong beliefs in things that aren't real to other people. Such as, believing that they're being followed, that someone is trying to harm them, or that they're getting secret messages (e.g., from a TV). This can be very scary for the person.

### Hallucinations

Hearing or seeing something that isn't there. Sometimes other senses like touch, smell or taste can also be affected.



*These symptoms are different for everyone. They might not be there all the time, can have different causes and can change over time.*

## What causes psychosis?

Like lots of mental health difficulties, psychosis is caused by a combination of different things. Things like genetics (inherited from parents) and a history of tough times (like trauma and childhood experiences) can make a person more vulnerable to psychosis.

Things people are exposed to in life (or 'stressors') can also feed into psychosis. They include:



**Alcohol and other drug use**



**Grief and loss**



**Difficult times with family or friends**



**Problems at school, uni, TAFE or work**



## Where psychosis can occur

Experiencing psychotic symptoms doesn't necessarily mean that someone has a psychotic illness. More than three quarters of psychotic experiences don't progress to an illness.

Many people think that people experiencing psychosis have schizophrenia. But there are lots of other disorders that have psychotic symptoms, including:

- brief psychotic disorder
- schizophrenia
- substance/medication-induced psychotic disorder
- bipolar disorder
- major depression with psychotic features
- delusional disorder.

Because symptoms can change over time, the type of disorder often changes too. Sometimes people are diagnosed with one thing, and then later the diagnosis is changed or removed.

## Getting support

**Psychosis can be frightening, confusing and disruptive – it's important to know that help is available and with the right support most people get better.**

If you think you're experiencing symptoms of psychosis, it's a good idea to seek help as soon as possible.

The earlier you get help, the better the results can be 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.

## Recovering from psychosis

**The recovery journey is different for everyone, and it can be an ongoing process. It's not just about getting rid of the symptoms – it's about learning to enjoy life while managing the tough times when they happen.**

**There can be ups and downs during recovery. People can sometimes feel like they're not getting better – it's important to be patient. Recovery takes time, support, and effort.**

### How is it treated?

**Treatments for psychosis usually include:**

- education about psychosis
- medicine
- counselling
- support from family, friends, community and/or mob
- practical support, like helping the person get back to studies or work.

### What does recovery involve?

**Recovery may involve:**

- learning how to build and maintain a healthy headspace – things like staying active, connecting with others, sleeping and eating well, and cutting back on alcohol and other drugs
- getting back a sense of control
- learning to manage symptoms so they have less of an impact on day-to-day life
- learning how to have supportive relationships
- going to school, uni, TAFE or work
- learning to be more independent.

When recovering from psychosis, it's important to manage other stressors in life. Learning ways to cope with stress and tough times can help manage symptoms of psychosis.



**If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://headspace.org.au)**

**If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.**

headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation is funded by the Australian Government.

 **headspace**  
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

The headspace Clinical Reference Group have approved this clinical resource. Fact sheets are for general information only. They are not intended to be and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific medical or health advice. While every effort is taken to ensure the information is accurate, headspace makes no representations and gives no warranties that this information is correct, current, complete, reliable or suitable for any purpose. We disclaim all responsibility and liability for any direct or indirect loss, damage, cost or expense whatsoever in the use of or reliance upon this information. 01 December 2022