

# Psychosis



## What is psychosis?

People with psychosis have problems in the way they interpret the real world. This means that psychosis may cause you to misinterpret or confuse what is going on around you. Psychosis usually affects your beliefs, thoughts, feelings and behaviour. For example, you may have hallucinations (in which you see or hear things that are not there) or delusions (false beliefs or ideas).



A first episode of psychosis is most likely to happen in late adolescence or in the early adult years. It is often frightening for you 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 help as soon as you can.



## 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 it's not. For example, you may believe the way that cars are parked outside the house means 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 you.

### Changed behaviour:

You may be extremely active or have difficulty getting the energy to do things. Your family may notice that you laugh when things don't seem funny to them or become angry or upset without any apparent cause.

## What are the types of psychosis?

Psychosis can occur for lots of reasons. 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



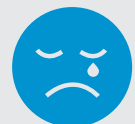
### Schizophrenia:

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:

Involves major changes including extreme highs and lows. People can experience psychotic symptoms as part of this disorder



### Depression:

Psychotic symptoms can occur in people with very severe depression

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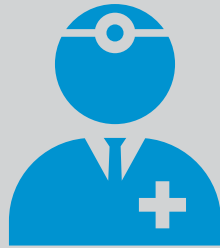
## What causes psychosis?

There is no one 'cause' of psychosis. It is often a combination of biological, psychological, social and environmental factors. This includes your genes (inherited factors) and the things you are exposed to in your life (e.g., stress, drug use or severe social problems).



## How do I get help?

Try to seek help as soon as possible if you have symptoms of psychosis, or if things don't seem quite right. 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 **headspace** or your local mental health centre will be able to provide the help you need.

## How is psychosis treated?

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

## How do I help someone 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, **headspace** centre or local mental health service. Encourage the young person to get

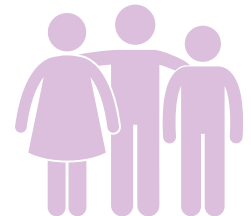
professional treatment as early as possible.

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 you think someone needs immediate medical support **call 000** or your local hospital or mental health service. Remember the person may be responding to things that are very real to them but do not make sense to you.

Supporting someone with psychosis can be a stressful experience for the whole family. There are support groups for family and friends so think about what help you may also need.



**headspace**  
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)