

Psychosis



What is psychosis?

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), psychosis is characterized as a disruption to a person's thoughts and perceptions. Someone experiencing psychosis may have difficulty distinguishing between what is real and what is not. Psychosis is considered a symptom

that is often associated with a number of psychiatric diagnoses. It is not an illness in itself and the symptoms often onset in late adolescence or early adulthood.

What are signs and stages of psychosis?

Warning Signs

- A decline in daily functioning, school or work performance
- Difficulty concentrating or thinking clearly
- Feeling suspicious, paranoid, or on edge around others
- A decline in personal hygiene
- Isolation or withdrawal
- Heighted emotional reactions or feelings of numbness

Early Psychosis

Early Psychosis includes many of the warning signs listed to the left but more amplified as well as the following signs:

- Seeing or hearing things that others do not
- Believing things that may seem unusual to others or that are not consistent with reality

Psychosis

Psychosis can involve a range of experiences, but the two most characteristic signs include the presence of hallucinations and delusions:

- Hallucinations are seeing, hearing or feeling things that are not there, such as hearing voices or experiencing strange sensations
- Delusions are beliefs that are strongly held even when they are contrary to the evidence presented. Delusions can be classified as bizarre or non-bizarre. An example of a delusional thought would be believing that one has special powers to control others.

What causes psychosis?

As with many psychiatric and mental health conditions, the cause of psychosis is not always clear. Doctors and researchers are still learning about how psychosis develops in the brain. Contributing factors can include a combination of genetics, history of substance use, psychiatric diagnosis (e.g., Schizophrenia, Bipolar Disorder), trauma, psychosocial stressors, illness or traumatic brain injury.

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How is psychosis treated?

Medication

Medications will likely be recommended to help decrease or eliminate psychosis. Atypical Antipsychotics are the most common type of medication used to treat psychosis. These medications work on the neurotransmitter, dopamine. Talk with your doctor about potential risks, benefits, side-effects, and alternatives related to medications. Medications may also be used to treat psychiatric issues contributing to psychosis.

Psychotherapy

Therapy, in conjunction with medications, can help improve management of psychosis by teaching effective coping strategies for dealing with hallucinations and delusions. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a particular evidenced-based intervention that teaches people more effective ways to evaluate and change thinking and behavioral patterns that may be reinforcing psychosis.

What else might be helpful?

Depending on other conditions or factors associated with or contributing to psychosis, different interventions may be warranted. The individual may benefit from substance abuse treatment or perhaps a higher level of psychiatric care, such as residential or partial hospital programs. These programs often offer support and education to family members and loved ones involved in the individual's care.

Who do I contact to find out more?

Referrals for therapy, medication management, and treatment programs can be made by physicians, mental health professionals, other allied health professionals, or from the patient or family directly. In addition, the National Alliance on Mental Health (www.namhinc.org) offers a range of resources for individuals and families dealing with mental illness.



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