

How do I recognise early signs?

The early signs of a psychotic episode can be hard to detect, but often a person may become suspicious of others, depressed, anxious, withdrawn, tense, irritable and/or angry. Mood swings, sleep disturbance and changes in appetite as well as difficulty in concentrating and remembering are common. A combination of some of these symptoms can be indications that a person is experiencing the early stages of a psychotic episode.

How is psychosis treated?

Determining the best treatment will depend on factors such as how severe the symptoms are, how long they have been present, and what the apparent cause is. The symptoms of psychosis are best treated with medication which can often provide a rapid decrease in symptoms and relief for the person. Practical assistance such as support and information for the family and specialised types of counselling/psychotherapy that involve learning how to reduce stress are also provided.

If you are concerned that you or someone you know is experiencing a psychotic episode, contact your family doctor or your local SF branch for advice on an early psychosis treatment service in your area.

Supporting Families in Mental Illness New Zealand



What is SF New Zealand?

SFNZ is a registered charity that provides education, advocacy and support for family/whanau of people experiencing a major mental illness.

SFNZ is recognised for its work in the mental health field as:

- ▶ A support service for those whose lives are affected by mental illness.
- ▶ An advocate for people affected by mental illness.
- ▶ An authority on good community care.
- ▶ An educational resource for families and the wider community.

www.supportingfamiliesnz.org.nz/branches.php

Psychosis

What do you know about it?



PSYCHOSIS: a state of mind in which a person loses touch with reality

Practical suggestions to help

Psychosis is a word that is used to describe a number of symptoms which indicate a person is losing touch with reality. Psychosis itself is not an illness, but it can be a sign of a number of mental illnesses which cause psychosis. When a person is experiencing psychosis this is called a *psychotic episode*.

What are the symptoms of a psychotic episode?

Some of the characteristic symptoms of a psychotic episode can include:

► *Confused thinking*

Everyday thoughts can become confused, sort of "jumbled up", making it hard to remember things or to follow a conversation. This also affects a person's ability to concentrate and express themselves to others in an understandable way.

► *Delusions*

A delusion is a fixed *false belief* not shared by others of a similar cultural or social background. There are a variety of different types of delusions called:

paranoid delusion – a belief that you are being watched or singled out for some harmful purpose, or are disliked;

grandiose delusion – a belief that you have special powers;

depressive delusion – a belief of personal guilt or responsibility for some horrific event that you had no direct part in, or a belief of not being fit to be with others; and

delusion of control – a belief that some force outside is controlling your thinking, feelings or actions.

► *Hallucinations*

An hallucination is seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting or feeling something that is not physically there. A common hallucination is hearing voices that no one else can hear.

► *Changed feelings*

During a psychotic episode a person experiences an extreme change in the way they feel and express emotions. Often there is a sense of *flatness* (sometimes called *blunted affect* – where a person feels less than they used to), or an excessive elevation in mood.

► *Changed behaviour*

Someone experiencing a psychotic episode will often behave differently than normal. Often their motivation for personal care lessens and daily tasks like dressing and cooking or cleaning up can feel impossible. Another typical behaviour is to withdraw from other people, spending more time alone or in bed.

What causes psychosis?

There are various causes of psychosis. Psychosis can be caused by:

- a developing mental illness, such as schizophrenia or bipolar mood disorder;
- drugs or alcohol – the excessive intake or abuse of drugs or alcohol can trigger a psychotic episode; or
- reactions to emotional stress in the case of severe personal trauma.

A chemical imbalance in the brain, which interrupts the normal transmission of information from one part of the brain to another, is considered to be the physical change that results in many of the symptoms of psychosis.

Can psychosis be treated?

The answer is yes! Early treatment is important as this can reduce the risk of a serious mental illness developing. It is important to recognise the signs of psychosis early because the longer psychosis goes untreated the greater the disruption to the person's life and the lives of their family/whanau. Early intervention increases the chances of a rapid recovery.

