

KNOW THE SIGNS...

The symptoms and signs of psychosis are many and varied and can change over time. Symptoms reflect a distorted view of reality and include hallucinations, delusions and/or disorganized thinking.

People may experience symptoms such as:

- hearing voices that no one else hears or seeing things that aren't there
- believing that others can influence their thoughts, or that they can influence the thoughts of others
- believing that they are being watched, followed or persecuted by others
- feeling that their thoughts have sped up or slowed down
- thinking in a confused way

Additional early signs of psychosis may include:

- withdrawal and loss of interest in usual activities
- loss of energy or motivation
- problems with memory and concentration
- deterioration in work or study
- lack of emotional response or inappropriate emotional display
- sleep or appetite disturbances
- unusual ideas or behaviours
- feeling "changed" in some way

These signs can indicate many things, particularly when exhibited during adolescence or young adulthood. But if they persist, they may indicate psychosis. A thorough assessment by a medical professional is necessary to determine whether or not psychosis is present.

THE CAUSE OF PSYCHOSIS...

It is difficult to know the cause of psychosis the first time it occurs. Psychosis is associated with a number of medical conditions including schizophrenia, depression, bipolar (manic depressive) disorder, and substance abuse, among others. Also, if there is a history of psychotic illness in the family, members are at increased risk for developing a psychotic illness themselves.

Early intervention is prevention

Visit the CMHA National Office
website: www.cmha.ca

Acknowledgements

EPPIC Early Psychosis Training Pack, Gardiner-Caldwell Communications Ltd., 1997.

Nova Scotia Hospital Information Sheets, 1997.

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Early Psychosis Intervention

Time is of the
essence...



CANADIAN MENTAL
HEALTH ASSOCIATION
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE
POUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE

PSYCHOSIS IS SERIOUS...

“At the first inkling, just get in there. Get help. That could be a way of delaying a full blown episode of psychosis.”

Psychosis is a serious medical condition that results from a disruption in brain functioning and affects up to 3% of the population. It involves some loss of contact with reality, characterized by significant changes in a person's thoughts, beliefs, perceptions and/or behaviours. Psychosis can be a very confusing and frightening experience.

Affecting males and females in equal numbers, psychosis most often begins during adolescence or young adulthood. While psychosis is a challenging condition to face at any point in life, its effects can be particularly disruptive during this important period of development. It can seriously damage a young person's sense of self, the ability to relate to others and the capacity to create a meaningful and productive future. If left untreated, psychosis can devastate the lives of young people and their families.

But, psychosis responds well to treatment... especially when it is caught early.

Early identification followed by comprehensive, individualized treatment strategies that incorporate the use of low-dose anti-psychotic medications with education and psychosocial interventions can promote full recovery from early psychosis. And research indicates that the sooner psychosis is appropriately treated, the better the outcomes.

“The earlier that an intervention occurs, the sooner that person will be able to recognize that they have an illness and can get better and can get on with their life.”

Unfortunately, the truth is that psychosis often remains untreated for many months. In fact, some people live with untreated psychosis for years.

DON'T DELAY...

Consequences of delayed treatment can include:

- disruption of life course
- disruption of relationships
- increased likelihood of substance abuse
- increased risk of depression and suicide
- loss of self-esteem and self-identity
- increased likelihood of hospitalization
- slower and less complete recovery
- poorer prognosis

Reasons for treatment delays include:

- inability of the individual, family or professional to recognize the signs and symptoms of psychosis, especially if symptoms emerge gradually
- inability of persons experiencing psychosis to perceive themselves as ill
- fear and stigma associated with mental illness
- limited access to appropriate services

In most cases, psychosis will not go away on its own. Early detection and appropriate treatment offer the best chance for full recovery.

THERE IS HOPE...

With appropriate early intervention, the consequences associated with untreated psychosis can be avoided or greatly minimized.

Benefits of early intervention can include:

- reduced disruption of activities
- reduced disruption of family and social relationships
- reduced likelihood of hospitalization
- reduced disability and fewer relapses
- reduced risk of suicide
- improved capacity to maintain self-identity and self-esteem
- faster and more complete recovery
- improved capacity to maintain life course

We can all help. In order to promote better outcomes for persons with psychosis, we can:

- **learn** the signs and symptoms of psychosis in order to identify it early
- **encourage** those who may be experiencing early psychosis to get help without delay. A family doctor or mental health professional can see that a thorough assessment is conducted. A medical professional who is experienced with early psychosis should be consulted.
- **educate** ourselves about the disorder and the best ways to treat it. The field of early psychosis intervention is relatively new and rapidly evolving. Mental health professionals are themselves learning about the latest approaches to treatment. Information is available. For example, visit the web site of the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre (EPPIC) in Australia: www.vicnet.net.au/~eppic.
- **work** to dispel the myths about mental illness and reduce the fear and stigma that can deter people from seeking help. Psychosis is a medical condition. It can happen to anyone. It can be successfully treated.