

What is Psychosis?

There is a group of illnesses which disrupt the functioning of the brain so much, they cause a condition called psychosis. When someone experiences psychosis they are unable to distinguish what is real — there is a loss of contact with reality. Most people are able to recover from an episode of psychosis.

What are the symptoms?

Among symptoms doctors look for are:

- ④ *Confused thinking*
When acutely ill, people with psychotic symptoms experience disordered thinking. The everyday thoughts that let us live our daily lives become confused and don't join up properly.
- ④ *Delusions*
A delusion is a false belief held by a person which is not held by others of the same cultural background.
- ④ *Hallucinations*
The person sees, hears, feels, smells or tastes something that is not actually there. The hallucination is often of disembodied voices which no one else can hear.

What causes Psychosis?

The causes of psychosis are not fully understood. They are likely to be a combination of hereditary and other factors. It is probable that some people are born with a predisposition to develop this kind of illness, and that certain things — for example, stress or use of drugs such as marijuana, LSD or speed — can trigger their first episode.

Some people experience a brief form of psychosis which lasts only a few days or weeks. Some people experience a few episodes of psychosis only. Some people experience psychosis associated with a longer-term illness such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.

How many people develop Psychosis?

About three in a hundred people will experience psychosis at some time in their lives. Most of these will be first affected in their late teens and early twenties.

How is Psychosis treated?

Treatment can do much to reduce and even eliminate the symptoms. Treatment should generally include a combination of medication and community support. Both are usually essential for the best outcome.

- ④ *Medication*
Certain medications assist the brain to restore its usual chemical balance. This then helps reduce or get rid of some of the symptoms.
- ④ *Community support programs*
This support should include information; accommodation; help with finding suitable work; training and education; psychosocial rehabilitation and mutual support groups. Understanding and acceptance by the community is also very important.

How do I find out more?

It is important to ask your doctor about any concerns you have. SANE Australia also produces a range of easy-to-read publications and multimedia resources on mental illness. For more information about this topic see:

- ④ *SANE Guide to Schizophrenia and other Psychotic Illness*
Explains what it means to have a psychotic illness such as schizophrenia, examining effective treatments and what family and friends can do to help.
- ④ *Schizophrenia Kit* (Includes a 37 minute DVD and *SANE Guide to Schizophrenia and other Psychotic Illness*)
People who've experienced illness and their carers talk about the things which have helped them cope better. See above for details on the SANE Guide included.
- ④ *SANE Guide to Medication and other Treatments*
Explains how all the different aspects of treatment work, by looking at clinical care, medication, support in the community and helping yourself.
- ④ *Voices: The Auditory Hallucinations Project*
An Audio CD that explains how it feels to hear voices and what can be done to help.

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