

Early Psychosis



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What is psychosis?

- Psychosis is a serious medical condition that causes changes in the brain.
- During an episode of psychosis, the messages between different parts of the brain are affected. This can make it hard for you to tell what is real and what is not.

What causes psychosis?

- There is no single cause of psychosis. It is often caused by a combination of:
 - › Biological factors (like age, injuries, infections, illnesses)
 - › Environmental factors (affected by your environment and lifestyle)
- Anyone can develop psychosis. You are at a higher risk of developing psychosis if:
 - › your parent or sibling has it. But you may also develop it even if you do not have a family history.
 - › you use cannabis, stimulants (amphetamines, methamphetamines), or hallucinogens (like cocaine, ecstasy, or LSD) regularly.

What are the signs of psychosis?

- › Withdrawing from your loved ones
- › Loss of interest in your usual activities
- › Loss of energy and motivation
- › Problems with memory and concentration
- › Feeling very suspicious, tense, or irritable
- › Trouble sleeping, feeling restless, or pacing at night
- › Hearing or seeing things that are not real
- › Confused speech or trouble communicating
- › Strange behaviour
- › No emotional response or an emotional response that does not match the situation

How is psychosis treated?

- Psychosis is often treated with medications called **antipsychotic medications**.
- **Most people with psychosis recover**. Some symptoms may go away quickly, but people usually recover slowly over time. Each person's recovery is different.
- Some people may still experience symptoms or have episodes of psychosis (relapses).
- Some people may experience psychosis long-term.

If you are experiencing psychosis:

- You will meet with a clinician (like a nurse, psychiatrist, social worker, or psychologist). They will:
 - › ask about your experience and may help you fill out questionnaires.
 - › help you learn about psychosis, recovery, and staying well.
 - › work with you to make a treatment and recovery plan.
- You will meet with your clinician regularly to:
 - › talk about how you are doing.
 - › track your progress.
 - › adjust your treatment plan, as needed.
- They may also connect you with other health care team members and services, as needed.

If your loved one is experiencing psychosis:

- You are an important part of your loved one's treatment and recovery. Learning about psychosis can help you:
 - › understand what your loved one may be going through and why they may be acting differently.
 - › help you feel more prepared to support them.If you would like to learn more about how to support your loved one, please ask a member of the health care team.
- It is also important to keep doing your usual activities and take care of yourself. For example:
 - › Eat healthy foods.
 - › Exercise regularly.
 - › Get enough sleep.
 - › Visit with friends.

Ask the clinician what supports are offered for loved ones.

Early Psychosis Intervention Services

Central Intake (19 years old and older)

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-855-922-1122
 - Option 1 – Western Zone (Annapolis Valley, South Shore, Southwest)
 - Option 2 – Northern Zone (Colchester, East Hants, Cumberland, Pictou)
 - Option 3 – Eastern Zone (Cape Breton, Guysborough, Antigonish)
 - Option 4 – Central Zone (Halifax Regional Municipality, West Hants)

IWK Central Intake (up to 19 years old)

- › Phone: 902-464-4110

Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-888-429-8167

Common terms

Antipsychotic: A type of medication used to treat psychosis.

Delusions: Fixed beliefs that are not real.

Depot injection or long-acting injection (LAI): A long-acting form of antipsychotic medication. It is injected into a muscle using a needle.

Dopamine: A neurotransmitter (chemical) in the brain. Antipsychotic medications slow dopamine's ability to send messages between nerve cells in the brain.

Hallucinations: Hearing, seeing, or feeling things that are not real.

Medication adherence: Taking your medication as prescribed.

Negative symptoms: Experiences that should be present, but are missing (like lack of energy or motivation, dulled emotions).

Neurotransmitter: A chemical that sends a message between nerve cells in the brain. Dopamine and serotonin are 2 neurotransmitters that are important in treating psychosis.

Oral medication: Medication that is taken by mouth.

Positive symptoms: Experiences that should not be present (like hallucinations and delusions).

Prodrome: The first phase (part) of a psychotic episode. There may be changes in the way you describe your feelings, thoughts, and perceptions (what you experience through your senses). These early warning signs may be hard to notice.

Relapse: When psychotic symptoms that were already treated happen again.

Remission: When symptoms have improved so that they no longer have a big effect on your life.

Recovery: An ongoing process that involves gaining control of your life, setting and achieving goals, and developing skills.

Serotonin: A neurotransmitter (chemical) in the brain. Antipsychotic medications either stimulate or block serotonin in nerve cells in the brain.

Schizoaffective disorder: A disorder in which you have symptoms of both a mood disorder (like depression or bipolar disorder) and schizophrenia.

Schizophrenia: A psychotic illness in which symptoms (like changes in behaviour) last for at least 6 months. Symptoms and how long the illness lasts will be different for each person. Many people with schizophrenia make a full recovery.

Schizophreniform disorder: An illness that is similar to schizophrenia, in which symptoms last for less than 6 months.

Substance-induced psychosis: A type of psychosis that happens when you start or stop substance use (like alcohol or drugs).

Resources

Because Your Mind Matters

Information on psychosis, and how to get support, manage psychosis, and prevent relapses for youth moving from high school to post-secondary education.

- › <https://becauseyourmindmatters.ca>

Canadian Consortium for Early Intervention in Psychosis

Resources for people experiencing psychosis, their loved ones, and health care providers, including videos and a podcast.

- › www.epicanada.org

Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia (CMHA NS) division

Education programs and support groups.

- › www.novascotia.cmha.ca
- › Phone (toll-free): 1-877-466-6606

Cannabis & Psychosis

Information for youth, young adults, and families about cannabis and psychosis.

- › www.cannabisandpsychosis.ca

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

6 free, self-paced, online modules for families of people affected by psychosis.

- › <https://moodle8.camhx.ca/moodle/course/view.php?id=16>

Early Psychosis Intervention (EPI)

Tools, information, and resources on early detection, stages of psychosis, illness management, and support for patients and families.

- › www.earlypsychosis.ca

Early Psychosis Intervention Ontario Network (EPION)

Tools and information on early detection, stages of psychosis, illness management, and support for patients and families.

- › <https://help4psychosis.ca>

Hope for Mental Health

Family education, one-on-one peer support, and support groups.

- › www.hope4mentalhealth.ca
- › Phone: 902-465-2601

LEAP Institute

Resources and education for loved ones and support persons of people who are experiencing anosognosia (they do not believe they are ill).

- › <https://leapinstitute.org/>

National Hearing Voices Network

Information and support groups for people who hear voices or see visions, and their families.

- › www.hearing-voices.org/#content

Nova Scotia Health Mental Health and Addictions Program

Information about mental health services available in Nova Scotia, and online mental health and addictions tools and resources.

- › <https://mha.nshealth.ca/en>

Psychosis 101

Information for youth, young adults, and families on detection, treatment, management, and support. Includes stories and videos of people experiencing psychosis.

› <http://psychosis101.ca/>

Schizophrenia Society of Canada

Information about cannabis and psychosis, schizophrenia, and supports for family caregivers.

› <https://schizophrenia.ca>

Understanding Voices

Information for people who hear voices, and their loved ones and support persons.

› <https://understandingvoices.com/>

**What are your questions?
Please ask a member of your health care
team. We are here to help you.**

Notes:

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Prepared by: Early Psychosis Intervention Nova Scotia (EPINS)
Designed by: Nova Scotia Health Library Services

WM85-2294 © January 2025 Nova Scotia Health Authority
To be reviewed January 2028 or sooner, if needed.