



November 2005



DETECT/DELTA Early Intervention in Psychosis

Fact sheet

## Special points of interest:

- Psychosis is a treatable condition.
- Psychosis affects 3 in every 100 people
- The earlier you receive effective treatment the better
- Your GP will know how to help.

***Psychosis is a common illness that can affect anyone but getting treatment early helps people to return to their normal lives.***

## What is psychosis?

A person who is suffering from an episode of psychosis can experience alteration in their perceptions of reality and can have difficulty thinking clearly as they normally would. When someone is affected in this way they may have unusual or strange ideas, they may hear or see things which are not there and they may have problems managing their emotions.

### Signs and Symptoms

The way in which a person experiences psychosis can vary greatly from one person to the next but there are some common symptoms which may occur during an episode of psychosis. Not everyone who experiences an episode of psychosis will have all of the symptoms, they may have just one or two symptoms but will still require treatment as these symptoms can occur at varying degrees of intensity and severity. Here are some of the common symptoms:

- **False Beliefs:** A person may have strong beliefs or ideas, which are not real to others. These beliefs are usually fixed and the person has difficulty believing they are not true despite evidence to the contrary. Some examples of this are people believing they have extraordinary powers, thinking they are being followed or having a sense that they are being communicated with through TV or the radio.
- **Hallucinations:** Hallucinations involve the five senses and affect the way in which a person interprets the world around them. When the senses are disrupted in this way a person may see things, which aren't there, hear things which aren't there and even taste, smell and feel things, which aren't there, these experiences seem so real that they have difficulty believing otherwise.
- **Confused Thinking:** When a person experiences psychosis their thoughts can become confused and muddled up, it can be difficult to have a conversation with someone when this is happening because their speech can be confused and disorganised. Sometimes the person feels as though their thoughts are racing or that they are slowed down in some way.
- **Changed Behaviour:** It is often the changes in people's behaviour during an episode of psychosis that draws attention to the fact that they are unwell. The person may have difficulty performing usual activities like schoolwork, paid work or hobbies. They may become more socially withdrawn or isolated. Sometimes the person may behave in an unusual manner; if they believe they are being followed they may act suspiciously or seem to be frightened; if they are hearing voices they may seem to be talking to people that aren't there.



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

## WHO CAN GET PSYCHOSIS?

**Psychosis is a common illness that can affect anyone but getting treatment early helps people to return to their normal lives.**

Psychosis affects 3 in every 100 people making it a common illness. It can happen to anyone but usually develops in late teens/early adulthood. It affects significantly more

males than females but women tend to develop psychosis later than men. It is important to remember that psychosis can be treated successfully if people get help early. It is widely accepted that the earlier people get help the better the outcome. 25% of people who develop psychosis will never have another episode, another

50% may have more than one episode but will be able to live normal lives. Some people who develop psychosis may need ongoing support and treatment throughout their lives.

**If you are concerned that a family member or a loved one is experiencing psychosis please consult your GP who will know how to help.**

***With effective treatment most people will recover from their first episode of psychosis and may never have another episode.***

## WHAT ARE PHASES OF PSYCHOSIS?

Psychosis usually develops gradually over a period of time. It can happen that psychosis starts suddenly but this is not common, it generally occurs in three phases.

### Early Warning Phase

Adolescence is a time of change for a young person so it can be difficult to recognise the difference between changes that are happening during normal development and changes that occur because of psychosis developing. However, there are common early warning signs that may happen before a first episode of psychosis. These changes may last for months and will impact negatively on the persons functioning but each persons experience will differ and not everyone will experience all of the following "common signs".

Reduced concentration

Depressed mood

Anxiety

Suspiciousness

Withdrawal from family and friends

Decreased motivation

Sleep disturbance

Social withdrawal

Deterioration in functioning

Odd beliefs/magical thinking

### Acute Phase

The acute phase is when the symptoms of psychosis begin to emerge and is also known as the "critical period". During this phase the person experiencing psychosis can become extremely distressed by what is happening to them or behave in a manner that is so out of character that family members can become extremely concerned and may start to seek help. Before this stage the individual may have been experiencing a more gradual decline.

### Recovery Phase

**With effective treatment most people will recover from their first episode of psychosis and may never have another episode.**

It is important to remember that psychosis is a treatable condition and if help is sought early, an individual may never suffer another episode. Initially, some of the symptoms that are apparent in the acute phase may linger in the recovery phase but with appropriate treatment most people successfully recover and return to their normal, everyday lives.

