

Psychosis is a symptom, not an illness. When a person cannot understand what is real or not, they may be experiencing psychosis. Psychosis is usually gradual and comes and goes (which is called “episodes”).

Symptoms of Psychosis

- **Hallucinations:** seeing, hearing, or physically feeling things that are not there.
- **Delusions:** strong beliefs that are unlikely to be true and may seem irrational to others.
- **Disorganized behavior or thinking,** such as saying things that do not make sense.

What are the risk factors of psychosis?

Scientists are still learning a lot about psychosis. Many believe that a combination of genes (like family history and parts of the brain) and stress (like substance use or trauma) can trigger psychosis.

What are the early warning signs?

It is best to treat psychosis as early as possible. Treating psychosis early may help it from getting worse. Some warning signs of psychosis are:

- A drop in grades or job performance
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Trouble concentrating
- Always “being on guard”, or being nervous around others
- A drop in self-care or hygiene (like no longer taking showers, brushing teeth, etc.)
- Strong, inappropriate emotions or having no feelings at all

What are the causes?

Young adults are at an increased risk to experience an episode of psychosis because of hormonal changes in the brain that occur during puberty. Other factors are:

- **Genetics.** Many genes are associated with the development of psychosis, but just because a person has a gene doesn’t mean they will experience psychosis.
- **Trauma.**
- **Substance Use.** The use of marijuana, LSD, and other substances can increase the risk of psychosis in people who are already vulnerable.
- **Physical Illness or Injury.**

Diagnosis

Because psychosis is a symptom, not an illness, having a psychotic episode can identify an illness. Doctors can draw information from medical and family history and a physical examination to make a diagnosis.

Treatment

Psychosis can feel scary, confusing, or stressful for the person going through it. It can also be hard to families to understand. A mental health professional can help with a treatment plan. A few treatments that may help with psychosis are:

- Psychotherapy

- Medication
- Complementary Health Approaches, such as
- First Episode Programs are for teens and young adults. They use a team approach and often include psychotherapy, medication, case management, education, and peer support.

How to talk to someone experiencing psychosis:

- Take deep breaths or count to 3 to help stay in control of your own feelings
- Use a neutral and calm voice
- Empathize with how they feel, even if you do not agree. For example, say: “It must be scary to feel like people are watching you.” You can agree that they are scared, even if you do not agree that people are watching them.
- DO NOT argue or debate what is real or not.
- Use short, clear sentences.
- Call your County Crisis line for help. You can find your County Crisis number here:
<https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/adults/health-care/mental-health/resources/crisis-contacts.jsp>

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