

PSYCHOSIS AND BRAIN INJURY

The word “psychosis” is used to describe a group of conditions that affect the mind and cause difficulty determining what is real. The person with psychosis loses contact with reality.

What are the symptoms of psychosis?

The symptoms of psychosis can include:

Hallucinations- sensing things when awake that appear to be real but are not actually there. The most common types of hallucinations involve:

- Hearing things such as sounds, music or voices
- Seeing patterns, people, animals or objects
- Feeling bodily sensations such as a crawling feeling on the skin or the movement of internal organs.

Delusions - false beliefs that the person thinks are true, but are not real to other people. They are often fixed and unshakeable. In a person with brain injury paranoid delusions are more common (e.g. people are talking about them, trying to kill them, spying on them).

Confused thinking - trouble thinking clearly and organizing thoughts. Speech may be difficult to follow and not seem logical.

Changed emotions - problems managing emotions and changes in emotions. Some people become withdrawn or isolated whereas others become overactive and behave in a way that is unusual for them.

Psychosis after a brain injury

Psychotic symptoms are more common in people who have had a brain injury. More severe brain injuries and damage to certain brain parts are associated with greater risk of developing symptoms.

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How is psychosis treated?

Medication is an effective way of relieving symptoms of psychosis and preventing relapse. It is thought that medication reduces the frequency and severity of symptoms by helping to restore the chemical balance of the brain. Psychological therapy can also be useful to help better manage stress, cope with symptoms and manage relapse.

It is important that the person experiencing psychosis is under the care of a mental health professional. A family doctor is able to make a referral to a psychiatrist or psychologist.

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Strategies for managing psychosis

- It is important to understand the illness and be aware of early warning signs
- Participate in programs and therapy aimed to improve coping strategies and reduce stress levels
- Keep active by participating in day to day activities, exercising and going out with friends/family
- Take medication prescribed by the treating doctor
- Try to maintain regular sleep patterns, eat well and avoid alcohol and drugs
- It is important to have someone supportive (family, friend or healthcare worker) to talk to

Crisis support can be obtained from dialing 811 or by dialing 911 if life is in danger