

Sometimes people with psychotic symptoms are reluctant to seek treatment. Perhaps they believe there is nothing wrong, or hope the symptoms will go away without treatment. They may be concerned about the actual treatment or worried about what people may think.

In recent years, research has led to the development of improved medications and therapies. A person with psychosis can be treated at home, with regular appointments at a mental health clinic. Home visits by a local mental health service can be arranged and if hospitalisation is required, this is usually only for a brief period.

Psychosis is like any other illness, in that it is treatable. Most people make a good recovery.

## What Will Treatment Involve?

The first phase of treatment involves assessment. This means having an interview with a mental health specialist, such as a psychiatrist, clinical psychologist, or community mental health nurse. The specialist will get to know the person, and will speak with family and friends to gain further information. Blood tests and x-rays can be performed to exclude a physical cause. The period of assessment can be a bewildering time and a great deal of reassurance and tolerance is needed. It is important to establish a trusting relationship wherever possible.

Information obtained from the person with the psychosis and their family and friends, together with any test results, will provide some idea about the type of psychosis being experienced, and how the person can best be helped.

Sometimes psychotic symptoms resolve rapidly and people resume a normal life. Other people take several weeks or even months to recover. Like any major illness, they may want to spend some time recovering and they may wish to use a variety of treatment options. Treatment options should be discussed with the person providing the treatment, as they probably have a good professional knowledge of what may or may not be helpful. Ultimately, determining the best treatment will depend on factors such as personal preference, how severe the psychotic symptoms are, how long they have been present, and what the apparent cause is.

## Medication

Medication is a crucial treatment for psychosis. Along with other forms of treatment, it plays a fundamental role in recovery from a psychotic episode and in prevention of further episodes. There are a number of different types of medication which are very effective in reducing the symptoms of psycho-

sis and the anxiety and distress these symptoms can cause. Treatment should commence with a low dose of anti-psychotic medication. Details about how much to take and when to take it will be worked out with the doctor. Medication should be monitored and if side-effects develop the type of medication or the amount taken may need to be changed. This is critical in order to avoid distressing side-effects which can lead to a person being unwilling to accept medication which is central to their recovery.

## Counselling and Psychological Therapy

Having someone to talk to is an important part of treatment. The exact method may vary to suit the individual and the phase of the psychotic episode. A person with acute psychotic symptoms may simply want to know there is someone who can understand their experience and provide reassurance that they will recover. As the recovery phase progresses, a person may ask 'why me?', and in doing so learn practical ways to prevent further episodes, such as stress management and early recognition of warning signs.

## Practical and Psychosocial Assistance

Treatment can also involve assistance with day-to-day things, such as getting back to school or work, gaining assistance with accommodation, or obtaining financial help. Treatment also means working with the person to identify what is important to them in their recovery. Treatment should not only be recovery-focussed, but also goal-focussed. This will vary from person to person, but may mean the goal of returning to school, getting a job, developing new interests, or meeting new people and making new friends. One-to-one counselling, group activities and activity based therapies can help a person to achieve these goals.

## When Should Hospital Be Considered?

Most people with psychosis can be supported at home by relatives or friends as long as they are provided with skilled and regular support from mental health professionals. First episode patients should be treated at home if possible, to minimise distress and disruption to the young person.

Home-based care can be provided by the local mental health service. Sometimes, however, there are benefits in spending a period of time in hospital before continuing with home treatment. Hospitalisation allows symptoms to be observed more fully, allows investigations to be carried out and helps with the start of treatment. Sometimes people request hospitalisation so they can rest and feel safe.

These days, hospitalisation is more commonly reserved for situations where psychotic symptoms are placing the person or other people at risk. For example, the person may be contemplating suicide. In such cases, hospitalisation allows assessment and treatment to be continued and ensures that the person is safe.

In some cases, admission may need to be arranged against the person's will or on an involuntary basis, at least in the beginning. However, treatment at home is always resumed as soon as possible, after the acute crisis has passed.

## How Can The Person With Psychosis Be Involved?

People with first episode psychosis are encouraged to be actively involved in their own treatment. There is a need to learn about psychosis, about the recovery process, and what they can do to promote and maintain their recovery. Sometimes there are secondary problems to be dealt with, like how to catch up with missed school or work, or how to cope with feelings of depression and stress related to the experience. It is important for the person to know their rights and to ask questions when something is not clear.

## The Course Of Recovery

The pattern of recovery from psychosis varies from person to person. Some people recover quickly with very little intervention. Others may benefit from support over a longer period. If the young person resumes cannabis use, this will almost certainly prolong any hope of recovery. Cannabis misuse may become a problem that requires treatment in itself.

Recovery from the first episode usually takes a number of months. If symptoms remain or return, the recovery process may be prolonged. Some people experience a difficult period lasting months or even years before effective management of further episodes of psychosis is achieved.

Most people recover from psychosis and lead satisfying and productive lives.

## Further Information

Other information sheets are:

- What Is Psychosis? – Fact Sheet 1
- Getting Help Early – Fact Sheet 2
- How Can I help Someone With Psychosis? – Fact Sheet 4

The EPPIC Information Sheets can be downloaded from either the EPPIC website [www.eppic.org.au](http://www.eppic.org.au) or the ORYGEN Youth Health website [www.orygen.org.au](http://www.orygen.org.au) and distributed freely without alterations.

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