

An episode of psychosis is when a person has a break from reality and often involves seeing, hearing and believing things that aren't real. Approximately 3 in 100 people will experience an episode of psychosis during their lives. Young adults are placed at an increased risk to experience an episode of psychosis because of hormonal changes in the brain that occur during puberty, but a psychotic episode can occur at any age.

Psychosis is not an illness, but a symptom. A psychotic episode can be the result of a mental or physical illness, substance use, trauma or extreme stress.

## Symptoms

Symptoms of a psychotic episode can include incoherent speech and disorganized behavior, such as unpredictable anger, but psychosis typically involves one of two major experiences:

- **Hallucinations** are seeing, hearing or physically feeling things that aren't actually there.
- **Delusions** are strong beliefs that are unlikely to be true and may seem irrational to others.

## Early Warning Signs

Most people think of psychosis as a sudden break from reality, but there are often warning signs that precede an episode of psychosis. Knowing what to look for provides the best opportunity for early intervention. Some indications are:

- A worrisome drop in grades or job performance.
- Trouble thinking clearly or concentrating.
- Suspiciousness or uneasiness with others.
- A decline in self-care or personal hygiene.
- Spending a lot more time alone than usual.
- Strong, inappropriate emotions or having no feelings at all.

## Causes

Several factors can contribute to psychosis:

- **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.** A traumatic event such as a death, war or sexual assault can trigger a psychotic episode.
- **Substance use.** The use of marijuana, LSD, amphetamines and other substances can increase the risk of psychosis in people who are already vulnerable.
- **Physical illness or injury.** Traumatic brain injuries, brain tumors, strokes, HIV and some brain diseases such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and dementia can sometimes cause psychosis.

## Diagnosis

Psychosis is a symptom, not an illness. A diagnosis identifies an illness, and symptoms are components of an illness.

Health care providers draw on information from medical and family history along with a physical examination to make a diagnosis. If causes such as a brain tumor, infection or epilepsy are ruled out, a mental illness might be the cause.

## Treating Psychosis

Identifying and treating psychosis as early as possible leads to the best outcomes. Early intervention is always the best approach to treating a mental health condition, because there is a chance of preventing the illness from progressing.

There are many specialized centers that focus exclusively on psychosis and crisis treatment in youth. The American Psychiatric Association, your state chapter of the APA, primary care doctor, insurance carrier and the state or county mental health authority are other resources that can help find you help.

Treatments for psychosis can include a combination of psychotherapy, medication, complementary health approaches or even hospitalization. It's important to work with a mental health care professional to determine the right treatment path.

See more at: <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Related-Conditions/Psychosis>

*Updated March 2015*