



PSYCHEDUP
with Dr. Diane McIntosh

Psychosis



What is Psychosis?

Psychosis is not a single disorder but a group of symptoms that can appear in several mental illnesses, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and severe depression. At its core, psychosis involves a partial loss of contact with reality, where thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, and behaviours may become distorted. While it can be frightening and confusing, both for the person and their loved ones, psychosis is treatable, and recovery is expected.

Recognizing Symptoms

Psychosis can affect thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, and behaviours. Common symptoms include:

Hallucinations: sensing things that aren't real, such as hearing voices, seeing things, or even smelling things that others don't perceive.

Delusions: strongly held false beliefs, which vary by condition:

- **Persecutory or paranoid delusions:** common in schizophrenia; involve beliefs that others are out to harm or monitor you. They are often dark, threatening, and deeply distressing.
- **Implausible delusions:** beliefs that have no basis in reality, like alien abduction or secret government missions. They are less common but can be highly disruptive.
- **Mood-congruent delusions:** reflect emotional state, typically in depression, such as believing one has a fatal illness. These delusions reinforce feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or guilt.

Disorganized thinking and behaviour: speaking or acting in ways that are hard to follow or chaotic, making daily functioning difficult.

Negative symptoms: a reduction or absence of normal behaviours, such as lack of motivation, inability to start activities, or emotional flatness.

Treating Psychosis



1. Medications

Antipsychotics are the primary treatment. They manage psychotic symptoms and can also help stabilize mood, reduce anxiety, and support depression. Treatment varies by condition:

- **Schizophrenia:** Antipsychotics, sometimes with additional medications for depression, anxiety, or insomnia.
- **Bipolar disorder:** Antipsychotics, mood stabilizers, or both.
- **Psychotic depression:** Typically a combination of antidepressant and antipsychotic.



2. Psychotherapy

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Psychosis (CBTp) works best after medication stabilizes symptoms. Early therapy focuses on:

- Reducing anxiety and stress
- Teaching relaxation and coping skills
- Building empathy and trust to reduce fear
- Supporting families in understanding and helping their loved one



3. Hospital Support

Severe episodes may require hospitalization to ensure safety and provide structured care, including medical evaluation, medication management, and support from psychiatric nurses and social workers.



4. Family Support and Advocacy

Families play a key role in recovery by learning to:

- Recognize signs of self-harm or suicide
- Communicate effectively with healthcare providers
- Advocate for their loved one



Support Organizations

[The Center for Addiction and Mental Health](#)

[The Center for Addiction and Mental Health - Early Psychosis Unit](#)

[Canadian Mental Health Association](#)

[Canadian Mental Health Association - Toronto](#)

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