**Understanding Psychosis and Treatments**

*What is psychosis?*

Psychosis is known as a **‘formal thought disorder’**, affecting people’s perception of the world around them. The two main symptoms of psychosis are hallucinations and delusional ideas.

A government report in 2016 found that 0.7% of adults had experienced psychosis during the last year: that’s over 1 person in every 200 people.

Hallucinations may be **seen** and/or **heard**, causing the individual to believe they’re experiencing things that are not there.

Delusional thinking involves holding **strong beliefs** that do not align with reality, such as paranoia that others are conspiring against them.

Both the hallucinations and the delusions feel **very real** to people with psychosis, which can make them difficult to cope with.

The symptoms of psychosis are generally described as positive or negative; this does not mean good or bad! Hallucinations and delusions are known as **positive** symptoms: they are added to the person’s life. **Negative** symptoms describe things that have been taken away, such as reduced display of emotions or lack of motivation. Psychosis can also be present in other disorders, such as schizophrenia or depression. It is sometimes used as an ‘umbrella term’ to describe experiencing hallucinations and/or delusions.

*What to do if you or a loved one are experiencing psychosis?*

If you are experiencing hallucinations and/or delusions, you may have spoken to your healthcare professional about **treatment**. There are several treatments for psychosis that have been supported with evidence: this means that professionals have a good level of confidence that they are effective. The most common interventions are **CBT** for psychosis, involvement with the **Early Intervention for Psychosis** team, or antipsychotic **medications**.

**Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for psychosis**

CBT is a **well-evidenced psychological treatment** for a variety of mental health conditions. It looks at patterns of thought and how they influence behaviour. CBT helps people better understand how their reactions to life events are influenced by their thoughts, core beliefs about themselves and the world, and their past experiences.

[This Photo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_behavioral_therapy) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)

CBT for psychosis, also known as **CBTp**, helps people address their hallucinations and/or delusions. The therapist would work with the client to help change the way they think about these symptoms, reducing the **distress** they cause. CBTp does not stop the symptoms altogether, but provides the tools to look at them in a new light. It **challenges the belief** that delusions and/or hallucinations are real, identifies what triggers them, and develops helpful coping strategies. Over time, you would learn to recognise when you are having hallucinations/delusions, and use your skills to help you manage.

**RESEARCH**

The effectiveness of CBTp has been demonstrated in psychological research. Several meta-analyses have been conducted: this is a research method which draws together the results of several studies to get a clearer overall picture. It has been found that CBTp is helpful in reducing both psychotic symptoms and associated anxiety and depression, particularly when given over 16 sessions of therapy. The benefits of education around psychotic symptoms have been emphasised alongside CBTp techniques. Please see references below.

**Early Intervention in Psychosis**

The EIP team is a group of professionals that help people experiencing their **first episode** of psychosis. They provide interventions to best meet the individual’s needs and support them through this time. **Research** has indicated that catching psychosis symptoms early helps with treatment: learning to recognise warning signs can help you get the support you need before symptoms worsen.

**Medication**

Psychosis can be managed with prescribed medication. This usually comes in the form of antipsychotics: names you may be familiar with are **quetiapine** and **aripiprazole**. These medications have been found to effectively reduce psychotic symptoms if taken as prescribed. You will need to **speak to your doctor** regarding advice about medication.

Commonly in mental health services, a combination of medication and talking therapy, such as CBTp, is recommended. A recent study found that combining CBTp with antipsychotics was more effective in reducing symptoms than CBTp alone; however, the research into this area is still emerging.

**Support**

It can be very unsettling or overwhelming to experience symptoms of psychosis, but we are here to support you! As you can see, there are plenty of options to help you overcome these challenges. If you would like to speak to someone about how you’re feeling or how to get support, you can always call Slough CMHT on 01753 690950.

Our supportive material on Managing Psychosis is the second part of this series and will give you some helpful tips on how to handle symptoms of psychosis if you’re experiencing them, so please click here to take a look. You can also find more information about psychosis on the Mind website by [clicking here](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/psychosis/about-psychosis/) or via the links below. Remember, help is available—you don’t have to cope by yourself!

References (referencing the work summarised above)

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Useful websites

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/psychosis/causes/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/psychosis/>

https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/psychosis.htm