

Contact us

For further information or advice, please contact a member of staff or

Mind (0845 766 0163)
Parkinson's UK (0808 800 0303)
or the Alzheimer's Society (0117 9672975)

For information on Trust services visit
www.awp.nhs.uk

PALS

To make a comment, raise a concern or make a complaint, please contact the Trust's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).

Tel: 01225 362900
Freephone: 0800 073 1778
Email: awp.pals@nhs.net

Other formats and languages

If you need this information in other formats (such as large print, Braille) or in another language, please call the PALS number.

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Avon and Wiltshire
Mental Health Partnership
NHS Trust

Psychosis in later life: misinterpreting the nature of reality

A brief leaflet explaining about the
visions, voices and delusional ideas that
may accompany a person's illness

you matter, we care

What is psychosis?

The term psychosis refers to experiences that don't seem to match everybody else's reality. These experiences may include hallucinations: visions, hearing things, and less often smelling or feeling things that 'aren't there'. The experiences may also include delusions: believing ideas that seem at odds with reality. The person may be distressed and will feel that these are very real experiences.

There are a range of circumstances that can result in psychosis.

For example:

- Schizophrenia, which can occur at any age, but is less common in older people
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Having one of the disorders that lead to dementia
- Being very depressed
- Some physical illnesses can cause or worsen the features of psychosis
- Some medications, such as strong painkillers, can cause hallucinations.

Visual or auditory hallucinations tend to be more common for someone where poor vision or hearing complicates their condition. Social isolation can also make hallucinations and delusions worse, as can traumatic life experiences.

It is essential for anyone trying to support the person to get to know them before concluding that they are experiencing psychosis. Occasionally, what appear to be delusional ideas are real.

Psychosis tends to be very bewildering and troubling for the person and those around them. With treatment its impact can be made manageable.

What can we do about psychosis?

Before starting any treatment it's important to work the likely cause of the psychosis and to assess the person's physical health.

Once this is achieved, appropriate interventions may be offered including:

- In schizophrenia atypical antipsychotics are commonly used to control a range of symptoms
- Antipsychotic medication must be used with great care for someone experiencing dementia. The care needed is even greater if the person has Dementia with Lewy Bodies or Parkinson's Disease
- People with drug or alcohol induced mental health problems are usually supported by a specialist service. Stopping drinking, nutritional support and medication can help.
- Antidepressants, Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) or psychotherapy are treatments for the depression that can cause delusions. Someone with dementia may also be depressed.
- Any infection, constipation or metabolic disorder which may be causing an acute toxic confusion, needs to be treated.
- Any medications for physical or mental illness will be selected and reviewed for effectiveness and minimal side effects.
- Assessing visual or hearing impairment and encouraging interactions with other people to reduce social isolation.
- Reassurance, without agreement or denial of the person's experiences, tends to be helpful.