

# Mood and Psychosis

## Signs & symptoms of psychosis for people with mood disorders



“Psychotic symptoms were some of the scariest parts of my mood disorder. At first, I didn’t talk about them, but I realized in order to get well I needed help with this too. Telling my doctor about the strange things I was experiencing was the best thing I did for my own health.”

**Hearing voices and seeing things that other’s don’t.**

**Feeling suspicious and paranoid.**

**Feeling and behaving in ways that are not yourself.**

**Having difficulty thinking and organizing your thoughts**

If you have depression or bipolar disorder and are experiencing some of these symptoms, it is important to tell your doctor about them. While not common, psychotic symptoms can be a part of a number of mental illnesses.

**It is in the normal range of human experience** to have symptoms such as hearing voices or having visual hallucinations very occasionally, especially on the edge of sleep or waking, or if you have not slept or eaten for a long time. However, if you have these types of symptoms often or persistently, then it’s time to talk to your doctor.

While schizophrenia is commonly thought of as the main mental illness that has psychotic symptoms, there are several mental illnesses that can have psychotic symptoms associated with them. This is not surprising, as these illnesses tend to be connected to similar types of problems in the brain.

**Bipolar disorder**—in bipolar disorder, psychotic symptoms tend to fit in with the person’s mood. For example a person who is depressed might hear voices telling them to kill themselves, or a person with mania might believe they have special supernatural powers.

**Schizoaffective disorder**—A person with this disorder has both a mood disorder and psychosis, and the voices, hallucinations or false beliefs are more independent of what is going on with their mood, and may be present even if their mood is stable.

**Depression and Post Partum Depression**—a person who is depressed may hear voices telling them things that go with the depression.

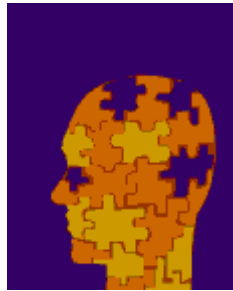
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### What Causes Psychosis?

We don't completely understand what causes psychosis or the psychotic symptoms sometimes associated with mood disorders. Many medical researchers think some people are born with a vulnerability or tendency towards psychosis. This doesn't mean they'll automatically become ill, but that if they are exposed to enough stress it can trigger psychosis.



Vulnerabilities may be genetic (inherited through your genes from your parents) or caused by things that happen during pregnancy or to the baby while being born. Stresses might include difficult life events or situations or drug use. Psychosis is sometimes also the result of other medical problems.

Psychosis is a medical condition and it can be treated.

**Almost always, psychosis improves with treatment. The sooner a person is treated the smoother their recovery will be.**

### How to Manage Symptoms

If you are already receiving treatment for your mood disorder, speaking to your doctor or care team about these experiences is a good place to start. Your medications may have to be adjusted to deal with these symptoms as well.



Cognitive behavioural therapy has been demonstrated to have good results with psychosis symptoms when combined with medication.

Many street drugs such as crystal meth (methamphetamine) and cannabis (marijuana) have been shown to increase psychotic symptoms. These drugs do no one's brain any good, but if you have experienced psychotic symptoms it is particularly important to avoid these drugs.

**"You don't have to deal with this alone. Help is available."**

**Help is available. Treatment works.**

### For more information:

**BC Schizophrenia Society**—[www.bcscs.org](http://www.bcscs.org) Information on psychosis and information for families.

**Early Psychosis Intervention Information** [www.psychosissucks.ca](http://www.psychosissucks.ca)

**Other fact sheets in this BC Partners series** on topics related to psychosis, including post partum depression & psychosis, and resources for families and children are available at [www.heretohelp.org](http://www.heretohelp.org)