

early psychosis: how to help recovery

What family and friends need to know



“My daughter didn’t know at first what she needed, but she did need us. It took some time, but now her good days are the norm rather than the exception.”

What to Expect

When your family member comes home from their first visit to the hospital, many of their symptoms may be reduced or gone, but some may remain. You can help them recover by maintaining a calm, positive environment for them, and by educating yourself about their illness.

It is quite normal for a person who has just experienced psychosis to:

- Sleep much more than usual.
- Need to have a lot of quiet, alone time.
- Be slower and not feel able to do much.
- Prefer low key, quiet activities with few people.

Slowing down and resting is part of allowing the brain to heal. Each person will recover at their own pace, and it could take months or years of this type of rest for someone to recover.

When they feel up to it, it is a good idea to gently encourage your friend or relative to do simple chores, hang out with family or go out to do activities they used to like. However, they may need a lot more alone time than usual.

Your loved one may seem emotionally distant during this time as well. When around people, they may be very quiet and just sit and watch, which is quite normal.

Help them by writing down the medications, dosages and information you receive from medical staff. It is common for it to take awhile to figure out which medication will work best for your loved one. Record-keeping can help.

Identifying Relapse Triggers

It is useful to think back on the signs your family member showed when they were first becoming ill.

Often, but not always, they will show similar signs if they are heading into a relapse or are

how to help people recovering from psychosis

under too much stress. Your relative may have signs that are unique to them.

The following are some common warning signs that someone might be getting ill:

- pacing, restlessness and nervousness
- hallucinations / voices
- suspiciousness
- disorganized thoughts
- speech that doesn't make sense
- difficulty concentrating
- bizarre behaviour
- a belief they have special powers
- feeling rested after almost no sleep for several days

Changes in sleeping habits, anxiety, agitation, depression, difficulty concentrating, isolating and irritability may be signs of a relapse, or they may be signs the person is under too much stress.

Another good way to help your loved one is to write down these symptoms if you notice them. If you notice these signs are worrying you or becoming more common, it is a good time to contact an appropriate person. This might be the Early Psychosis Intervention (EPI) clinic if they connected to one, or their mental health clinician.

Supporting Health

Some factors that are useful in supporting your loved one's health:

- Calm, quiet, low stimulation environment
- Gentle encouragement
- Let the person recover at their own pace
- Keep healthy foods around
- Provide encouragement if the person needs help with daily chores and personal care
- Give them their space to have quiet, rest and calm while they recover
- Keep the space at home as calm, quiet and low key as possible
- Speak calmly, slowly and simply
- Avoid arguing about delusions (false beliefs)
- Slowly and gently encourage the young person to continue to see friends, do activities or schooling or employment
- Keep pressure and stress low



For More Information

British Columbia Early Psychosis Intervention Program

— This site provides information about psychosis and contact information for Early Psychosis Intervention (EPI) services. These EPI services help young people with psychosis get rapid access to comprehensive, age-appropriate treatments. www.earlypsychosis.ca

British Columbia Schizophrenia Society

— Offers resources, support and information for families. www.bcscs.org