

What is

Brief Psychotic Disorder

Brief psychotic disorder

Psychosis is a condition which distorts a person's sense of reality.

With brief psychotic disorder a person experiences this condition for less than one month. There are a number of psychotic illnesses where the condition continues for longer periods.



Whanau/Family/Friends: Supporting the person through this confusing time helps them feel less isolated and alone and can help them deal better with their illness.

What causes brief psychotic disorder?

No-one knows exactly what causes brief psychotic disorder. Possible causes include inherited factors, or traumatic events in the person's past. A psychotic episode may be experienced after a significant stress of some kind, such as the loss of a loved one, or a traumatic event, like an assault. It may also occur following the birth of a child. It is important to be open about any history of illicit drug use, as this can also cause brief episodes of psychotic symptoms.


What are the symptoms?

Everyday thoughts may be confused or disjointed which may make communication with others difficult; the person may believe that thoughts are being put into their mind, that they have special powers or that they are being spied on. They may experience hallucinations where they hear, see or otherwise perceive things that others do not. Hearing voices is very typical of psychosis and can be extremely distressing to the person. Things seem to speed up or slow down. Colours or sounds may take on a different quality from normal. Other symptoms may include loss of motivation, withdrawal from others and changes in mood including depression, extreme elation, uncontrollable laughter or crying or 'flattened' emotions where they may feel completely cut off from feelings. They may neglect personal care or dress. They do not realise that their experiences are the result of being unwell.

It is important that anyone assessing a person with the above symptoms distinguishes what appear to be unusual beliefs or experiences from ones that are acceptable or normal within the person's religion or culture.

How is it treated?

Where possible, brief psychotic disorder is treated in the community, rather than in a hospital. Medication is often part of the treatment and a psychiatrist determines if it is needed. Non-medical treatments should include the opportunity for the person and their whanau/family to learn about brief psychotic disorder, to have professional help with communicating effectively, solving problems, dealing with stress and making a plan for staying well. The person may also benefit from personal counselling or psychological therapy. Some people find complementary treatments such as vitamins, exercise or massage helpful, but these should be used in consultation with a psychiatrist.

 *SEEK HELP EARLY - Brief psychotic disorder can be effectively treated. The earlier treatment is started, the better the chances of full recovery without the person being disadvantaged in any way.*

Who gets it?

Brief psychotic disorder is rare. When it occurs, it is most often in adolescence or early adulthood. Recurring psychosis is also rare – the person generally recovers and returns to their usual level of activity. If they go on to experience a number of periods of psychosis it may mean that they are in the early stages of a condition such as schizophrenia or bipolar affective disorder. This will only become apparent with time.

 *Early recognition and care are critical because there is a significant risk of suicide during a period of brief psychotic disorder - good support and care can prevent this from happening.*

Where can I get more information?

Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand

for resources, videos, books and further information.

81 New North Road, Eden Terrace, Auckland

Phone: (09) 300 7030, Fax: (09) 300 7020

Email: resource@mentalhealth.org.nz

Website: www.mentalhealth.org.nz

(see 'Information' for a full description of brief psychotic disorder)

N.B. There is little information specifically about brief psychotic disorder available, but much about psychotic illnesses in general. Local mental health services and consumer and whanau/family support organisations will have a range of such material.