

FACT SHEET:

Category:
Mental Health

Audience:

Person with an ABI;
Family and Support
Workers; and
Professionals

For more information
contact the Acquired Brain
Injury Outreach Service
(ABIOS)

PH: (07) 3176 9506

Email: abios@health.qld.gov.au

Address: PO Box 6053, Buranda 4102

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ABIOS Neuropsychologist



ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

Psychosis and Brain Injury

Introduction

The word “psychosis” is used to describe a group of conditions that affect the mind and cause difficulty determining what is real. The person with psychosis loses contact with reality.

What are the symptoms of psychosis?

The symptoms of psychosis can include:

Hallucinations - sensing things when awake that appear to be real but are not actually there. The most common types of hallucinations involve:

- Hearing things such as sounds, music or voices
- Seeing patterns, people, animals or objects
- Feeling bodily sensations such as a crawling feeling on the skin or the movement of internal organs



Delusions - false beliefs that the person thinks are true, but are not real to other people. They are often fixed and unshakeable. In a person with brain injury paranoid delusions are common (e.g. people are talking about them, trying to kill them, spying on them).

Confused thinking - trouble thinking clearly and organizing thoughts. Speech may be difficult to follow and not seem logical.

Changed emotions - problems managing emotions and changes in emotions. Some people become withdrawn or isolated whereas others become overactive and behave in a way that is unusual for them.

Psychosis after a brain injury

Psychotic symptoms are more common in people who have had a brain injury. Studies show that about 1 in 20 people with a brain injury will experience symptoms of psychosis. More severe brain injuries and damage to certain brain parts are associated with greater risk of developing symptoms.

What are the causes of Psychosis?

The exact cause of psychosis is not fully understood. It is known that a combination of factors such as having a genetic predisposition, a chemical imbalance in the brain and environmental factors (e.g. high levels of stress, adverse traumatic events, limited support, and physical illness) can influence the development of psychosis. Excessive alcohol and cannabis use has been shown to trigger and/or worsen symptoms of psychosis.

How is psychosis treated?

Medication is an effective way of relieving symptoms of psychosis and preventing relapse. It is thought that medication reduces the frequency and severity of symptoms by helping to restore the chemical balance of the brain. Psychological therapy can also be useful to help better manage stress, cope with symptoms and manage relapse.

It is important that the person experiencing psychosis is under the care of a mental health professional. A GP is able to make a referral to a psychiatrist or psychologist.

Strategies for managing psychosis

- It is important to understand the illness and be aware of early warning signs
- Participate in programs and therapy aimed to improve coping strategies and reduce stress levels
- Keep active by participating in day to day activities, exercising and going out with friends/family
- Take medication prescribed by the treating doctor
- Try to maintain regular sleep patterns, eat well and avoid alcohol and drugs
- It is important to have someone supportive (family, friend or healthcare worker) to talk to

Resources

See other Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service (ABIOS) Information sheets at <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/abios/>

For further information on psychosis see the following websites:

- Sane Australia - <http://www.sane.org/>
- Headspace - <http://www.headspace.org.au/>

Crisis support can be obtained from Lifeline’s 24 hour counselling service by phoning 13 11 14 or by dialling 000 if life is in danger.



Notes:
