

Introduction

Psychotic disorders are severe mental disorders that cause abnormal thinking and perceptions. These disorders cause people to lose touch with reality.

As a result, people with psychotic disorders find it difficult to think clearly, communicate effectively, and behave appropriately. With treatment, many people improve enough to lead satisfying lives.

This reference summary will help you understand the different types of psychotic disorders. It discusses the symptoms, causes, and treatment options that are commonly associated with these disorders.



Psychotic Disorders

Psychotic disorders are severe mental disorders that cause abnormal thinking and perceptions. Psychotic disorders cause people to lose touch with reality.

A person with a psychotic disorder has trouble telling the difference between what is real and what is imagined. The main symptoms of psychotic disorders are delusions and hallucinations.

Delusions are false beliefs, such as thinking that someone is plotting against you or that the TV is sending you secret messages. A person with a psychotic disorder may believe that these fantasies are true, even when proof is given that they are not.

Hallucinations are false perceptions, such as hearing, seeing or feeling something that is not there. A person experiencing a hallucination is unlikely to recognize that it is not real.

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There are several types of psychotic disorders that can cause delusions and hallucinations, including:

- Brief Psychotic Disorder
- Delusional Disorder
- Schizoaffective Disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Schizophreniform Disorder
- Shared Psychotic Disorder

Brief psychotic disorder is a short-term illness with psychotic symptoms. These symptoms come on suddenly but usually last less than one month.



Delusional disorder is an illness in which a person holds onto a false belief that is based on an incorrect assumption about the real world. The person holds onto the false belief despite the evidence to the contrary.

Schizoaffective disorder is not well understood or defined. It is a mix of multiple mental health conditions and it may appear differently in each person. It involves hallucinations and delusions, as well as mood disorder symptoms like mania and depression.

Schizophrenia is an illness that causes changes in behavior, delusions and hallucinations. It lasts longer than 6 months and often causes problems with work, school, and social functioning.

Schizophreniform disorder is an illness in which people have the symptoms of schizophrenia but the symptoms only last between one and six months. It is a type of temporary schizophrenia.

Shared psychotic disorder is an illness in which a person develops delusions as a result of being in a relationship with, or by being in close proximity to, a person who already has delusions.

Some psychotic disorders are caused by other medical problems and are temporary.

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Hallucination and delusion symptoms go away once the underlying medical problem is treated.

When their symptoms are severe, people with psychotic disorders have difficulty staying in touch with reality. This makes meeting the ordinary demands of daily life very difficult. The good news is that people with severe psychotic disorders usually improve with treatment.

Symptoms

Not everyone experiences the symptoms of a psychotic disorder the same way. Symptoms may also change over time. The following section reviews some of the symptoms commonly associated with psychotic disorders. The major symptoms of psychotic disorders are hallucinations and delusions.



Hallucinations are false perceptions. They cause a person to experience something that is not really happening. The most common hallucinations are visual and auditory hallucinations, things that are seen or heard.

Hallucinations can affect any of the 5 senses, including:

- Hearing
- Sight
- Smell
- Taste
- Touch

Hallucinations might cause a person to see things that aren't there, hear voices, or smell odors. Hallucinations might also cause a person to have a strange taste in their mouth or feel sensations on their skin even when nothing is touching their body.

Delusions are another symptom of psychotic disorders. Delusions are false beliefs. People who experience delusions believe bizarre or impossible things. They hold onto these beliefs even when they are presented with information that shows the beliefs are not true.

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Delusions can take many forms. A common type of delusion is a grandiose delusion. Grandiose delusions cause people to believe that they are much more important than they really are. For example, a man may believe he is the emperor of the moon.

Another common delusion type is a persecutory delusion. Persecutory delusions cause people to believe that there is a conspiracy to harass, punish, or otherwise attack them. For example, a person with this delusion might believe that the ethnic group he or she belongs to is being harassed or punished.

Other types of delusions include:

- Delusional jealousy, or an ongoing suspicion about the faithfulness of a loved one
- Erotomanic delusions, or a romantic or sexual fixation on another person
- Delusions about the body, usually over-imagined health problems

Psychotic disorder symptoms that are not related to hallucinations or delusions include:

- Bizarre, possibly dangerous behavior
- Mood swings or other mood symptoms, such as depression or mania
- Cold, detached manner with the inability to express emotion
- Confused thinking

Other non-hallucinatory, non-delusional symptoms include:

- Disorganized or incoherent speech
- Slowed or unusual movements
- Loss of interest in personal hygiene
- Loss of interest in activities
- Problems at school or work and with relationships



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Causes

The exact cause of psychotic disorders is not known. Researchers believe that many factors may contribute to psychotic disorders. Genetics, environmental factors, and biological factors could be involved.

Mental health problems tend to run in families. For this reason, many professionals think that psychotic disorders are related to genetics. It is also possible that psychotic disorders are caused by environmental factors. Environment refers to the conditions surrounding a person's upbringing.

Some environmental factors that may be related to psychotic disorders include:

- Stress
- Drug abuse
- Exposure to violence
- Major life changes



Psychotic disorders could also be related to imbalances of certain chemicals in the brain. Dopamine is a substance that helps nerve cells in the brain send messages to each other. An imbalance of this chemical could cause hallucinations and delusions.

It is estimated that 1% of the world's population suffers from some type of psychotic disorder. Disorders often first appear between the late teen years and the late 30s. Psychotic disorders tend to affect men and women about equally.

Diagnosis

No medical tests can diagnose a psychotic disorder. The diagnosis should be made by a psychiatrist. A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who specializes in mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders.

A complete social and medical history is needed to diagnose a psychotic disorder. The psychiatrist may ask about symptoms and family history. Family members or friends may also be interviewed. This helps the psychiatrist determine any changes in your behavior.

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The psychiatrist will use a specially designed interview to help with the diagnosis. The psychiatrist will decide if the responses given during the interview suggest a psychotic disorder as the cause of symptoms.

Several tests may also be used to rule out physical illness as the cause of the symptoms. Blood tests, brain images, and x-rays may also be done. These tests can help make sure the symptoms are not caused by some other health problem.

Treatment

Only two types of psychotic disorders are considered temporary and can be cured:

- Substance-Induced Psychotic Disorder
- Psychotic Disorder Due to a Medical Condition

For these types, hallucination and delusion symptoms may permanently go away once the underlying condition is treated.

There is no cure for the other types of psychotic disorders. However, treatment can help control the symptoms. With treatment, many people improve enough to lead satisfying lives. Treatment for psychotic disorders varies for each disorder. Medications to control symptoms and some form of talk therapy may be involved.



Antipsychotic medication can relieve many of the symptoms of a psychotic disorder. These medications work by changing the balance of chemicals in the brain. It can take several tries before you find the medication that works best. Talk to your healthcare provider to find out which medications might work best for you.

You can reduce relapses by staying on your medication for as long as your doctor recommends. Symptoms will return if you don't take your medication. You should never start or stop a medication without your healthcare provider's approval.

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After finding a medication that works, people with psychotic disorders can also benefit from some type of psychosocial treatment. Psychosocial treatments focus on helping people with the emotional and social parts of a disease. Illness management skills are one example of psychosocial treatments. This type of treatment can help a person with a psychotic disorder learn how to manage their illness.

Family education is another example of a psychosocial treatment. It focuses on ways to help the whole family learn how to cope with the illness from day to day. Rehabilitation may be useful in helping a person with a psychotic disorder find a job. It also teaches everyday living skills.



Self-help groups provide support for people with psychotic disorders and their families. Therapy is another psychosocial treatment that may help some people manage their symptoms.

Treatment for drug and alcohol abuse may also be beneficial. Taking illegal drugs and drinking too much alcohol are problems for some people with psychotic disorders. A person is less likely to follow a treatment plan when using drugs or alcohol. Also, using drugs and alcohol can make medications less effective. Smoking cigarettes can also make antipsychotic medication less helpful. People with psychotic disorders may need medical help to quit smoking because it can temporarily make symptoms worse.

Electroconvulsive therapy, or ECT, is sometimes used to treat severe depression. However, it can also be used for other mental illnesses, like schizophrenia. During ECT, an electric current is briefly applied through the scalp to the brain. This causes a seizure. It may help “reset” the brain and improve symptoms.

Hospitalization is an option for serious cases of psychotic disorder. It is usually recommended when a person might harm themselves or others. Residential treatment is sometimes recommended for people who need a supportive place to live while they receive treatment for a personality disorder.

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Summary

Psychotic disorders are severe mental disorders that cause abnormal thinking and perceptions. People with psychoses lose touch with reality. Two of the main symptoms are delusions and hallucinations.

Delusions are false beliefs, such as thinking that someone is plotting against you or that the TV is sending you secret messages. Hallucinations are false perceptions, such as hearing, seeing or feeling something that is not there.

No medical tests can diagnose a psychotic disorder. The diagnosis should be made by a psychiatrist. A thorough social and medical history is essential to diagnose a psychotic disorder. The psychiatrist may ask about symptoms and family history.



Treatment for psychotic disorders varies by disorder. It might involve drugs to control symptoms and talk therapy. Hospitalization is an option for serious cases where a person might be dangerous to himself or others.

For most types of psychotic disorders, there is no cure. However, treatment can help control the symptoms of these ongoing psychotic disorders. With treatment, many people improve enough to lead satisfying lives.

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