

Relapse *Prevention*

A reoccurrence of psychosis is called a “relapse”.

Unfortunately, many people who have had a first episode of psychosis will experience a relapse in the future. Psychotic relapses are very distressing and disruptive. They are associated with more secondary problems (such as depression and anxiety) and make recovery more challenging.

Preventing relapse is one of the most important aspects in your recovery.

Treatment helps prevent relapse

There are a number of steps that you can take to prevent a relapse.

These include:

- 1) Regularly taking your medications for some time even when you are no longer experiencing symptoms
- 2) Both you and your family becoming educated about psychosis, treatment and the recovery process
- 3) Sustaining your social contacts and supports
- 4) Using stress management techniques
- 5) Maintaining a healthy lifestyle

These steps all help to greatly lower your risk of relapse. But unfortunately - even if you do everything right - the risk

of relapse is not completely eliminated and relapse still remains a possibility.

So it's very important to make additional efforts in order to prevent an impending relapse or to shorten the duration of any relapses that do occur.

Recognizing early warnings signs of relapse

Prior to relapse there are often changes in behaviour, thoughts or feelings. These changes may be similar to the changes you experienced before your first episode or they might be different. These symptoms are referred to as “early warning signs” and may indicate that a relapse is about to occur.

Prior to a relapse a person may experience:

- a) Brief or mild “psychotic-like symptoms” such as brief or poorly formed hallucinations, suspiciousness and mental confusion.

and/or

- b) “Non-specific symptoms” – these are symptoms that do not resemble psychotic symptoms themselves and include disturbances of sleep, anxiety, difficulties concentrating and depression.

Warning signs may be the result of being under stress (remember that according to the stress vulnerability model, stress increases the risk of psychosis developing).

In many cases, the use of effective stress management strategies will reduce these warning signs. Sometimes, stress management strategies will not be sufficient and other strategies (such as increasing medication dose) might be needed.

Relapse Prevention Plan

An individualized relapse prevention plan for you and your family will be developed and should be used when early warning signs are noticed. This plan will outline the steps to contact appropriate service providers, initiate stress management and/or use medication strategies as appropriate. You will be given a copy of the plan so that you can refer to it when any early warning signs occur.

By monitoring for early warning signs and taking the appropriate actions, you may be able to prevent a relapse before it happens. You should periodically review your relapse prevention plan with your EPI Clinician and Psychiatrist and modify it as needed.

What if a relapse occurs?

If relapse does occur, it's important to reduce its length and intensity. This will help to improve the chances of good recovery and minimize the disruption to your life. Identify the triggers of the relapse, refine the relapse prevention plan and work towards avoiding any future relapses.