

# Preventing relapse

Good treatment helps people with psychosis get better. But sometimes psychosis comes back after you've recovered. When psychosis comes back this is called a relapse.

Getting good treatment also helps prevent psychosis from coming back. But even if you are getting good treatment and doing everything right, there is still a risk that psychosis can start to come back. Here we'll look at some other things you can do to prevent relapse.

Preventing relapse involves getting good treatment and...

1. Controlling triggers for psychosis
2. Recognizing early warning signs of psychosis
3. Having a good relapse prevention plan in place

## 1. Controlling triggers for psychosis

Certain things like stress or use of street drugs can increase risk of psychosis – these are **triggers** for psychosis.

**Some of the more common triggers for psychosis include:**

- ✦ Arguments
- ✦ Problems with family or friends
- ✦ Problems at work or school
- ✦ Drug or alcohol use
- ✦ Poor sleep

Look back at the last time you experienced psychosis. What was happening at the time? Were there life changes you experienced? Was something making you stressed?

Are there triggers increasing your risk of psychosis now? Stressful situations? Drug use? Poor sleep?

Once you know what your triggers are, you can start to plan to control these. You might want to try to limit your use of street drugs. Or you might problem solve with your EPI Clinician about difficulties you are having getting along with friends or family.

My triggers for psychosis	My plan to control these triggers

## 2. Recognizing the early warning signs of psychosis

Many people experience changes in behaviour, thoughts or feelings before symptoms of psychosis appear. **These are often called “early warning signs” – signals that something is not right.**

### **Common early warning signs:**

- ✦ Sleeping too much or too little
- ✦ Feeling anxious
- ✦ Feeling sad
- ✦ Finding it difficult to concentrate
- ✦ Feeling more sensitive to sounds, lights or colours
- ✦ Missing work or school
- ✦ Feeling high or “excited”
- ✦ Talking more or less than usual
- ✦ Not enjoying hobbies
- ✦ Not showering or taking care of yourself
- ✦ Not wanting to go out or spend time with family or friends
- ✦ Becoming easily annoyed at others
- ✦ Feeling suspicious of other people

**Think back to the time before you developed psychosis when you first noticed that you weren't doing as well as usual. What were the first changes you noticed?**

Knowing what early warning signs you had before developing psychosis will help you know what to look for. The same changes may signal any future relapses.

Early warning signs may be normal responses to stress. You might start to experience these changes in a stressful situation. Responding to early warning signs by doing things that reduce your stress helps reduce the risk of relapse.

What were your early warning signs before you experienced symptoms of psychosis? Ask other people who were around you what they noticed too.

Try to write down your early warnings signs in a specific way that allows other people to observe them (for example, “crying every day for three days in a row” instead of “feeling sad for three days”).

Write down the three most obvious early warning signs you have experienced.

My early warning signs
1.
2.
3.

### 3. Preventing psychosis from coming back

What should you do if you do experience early warning signs? You need a plan. The purpose of this plan is to help prevent the psychosis from coming back. This is your “relapse prevention plan”. With a good **relapse prevention plan**, you can do much to prevent a relapse from happening.

**Work with your EPI Clinician in coming up with your own plan.** You will need to talk with the Psychiatrist who is prescribing your medication to see if any pre-arranged medication strategies are right for you.

You should also come up with an emergency plan in case things suddenly get really bad. You can use this plan if you get thoughts of suicide or you can't cope with your symptoms.

There are many different things you can include in your relapse prevention plan.

Contact people who can support you

- ✦ EPI Clinician or Psychiatrist
- ✦ Family
- ✦ Close friends

Identify ways you can cope

- ✦ Relaxation strategies
- ✦ Reducing your responsibilities
- ✦ Engaging in calming or enjoyable activities

Medication strategies (pre-arranged with your Psychiatrist)

- ✦ Increasing the dose of your medication
- ✦ Using another type of medication for a short time

## My Relapse Prevention Plan

Name:

Triggers I'm trying to control:

My early warning signs are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

*NOTE: Any other unusual changes should also be acted on.*

When I have any of these early warning signs, I will do the following:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Phone numbers of my health professional(s):

Phone numbers of my Support Person(s):

In case of emergency I will do the following:

## More about your relapse prevention plan...

After you have filled in this relapse prevention plan, you should print it and **keep it someplace handy – like your wallet.**

It's important too that your **EPI team, other health professionals like your general physician, and your family or very close friends also have a copy.** You will be more likely to catch early warnings signs if you have a number of people watching for them.

Your relapse prevention plan will need to be checked regularly in order to:

- Update your triggers as these will change over time
- Update your early warning signs, being very cautious at first
- Update your plan as needed

If psychosis does come back, then it's important to get good treatment right away. This will reduce the duration and impact of the relapse.

Having the psychosis come back doesn't mean that watching for early warning signs won't work for you. It's just that it can take time to figure out which early warning signs to watch for. It can also take time to find a plan that works well for you.