



HEARING VOICES

FACTSHEET

This factsheet will provide you with information, advice and links to helpful websites about what to do if you are hearing voices.

Hearing voices

Hearing voices or 'auditory hallucinations' is when it seems like someone is speaking to you. This could be through voices that appear to be heard through your ears, or they might feel like they are coming into your mind from around you. Sometimes these voices may say things which are upsetting, tell you what to do or comment on day to day activities like a commentary and interfere with everyday life.

Some people hear terrifying voices, some hear supportive voices and some hear voices telling them to do things. If we get enough stress, then all of us can hear voices when there is nobody there. Most people will remember a time when they thought that they heard someone call their name, but there was no one there. This can be worse when people take some types of drugs, if they are extremely tired or if they are stressed, such as when they are grieving for a loved one who has died recently.

Where people have troublesome, scary or dangerous voices, it is usually part of a mental illness called Psychosis. Psychosis is a word often used when a person loses some contact with reality and they cannot cope with normal situations. Psychosis can cause people to become socially withdrawn, isolated and scared and can be very distressing for those around them.

What causes psychosis?

Anyone can experience a psychotic episode. Though each case is different, there are some common causes. A short episode may be caused by extreme lack of sleep or using too much alcohol or using even small amounts of certain drugs. It is common for stress and trauma to cause a person to develop psychosis. Living in a difficult family environment can contribute, though it is not clear if it is the stress of living in that environment that is the problem, or if it is caused by genes passing down the problem from one generation to another. In many cases there isn't an obvious cause because some people are stressed by things that others don't think are important.

Who is more likely to experience psychosis?

About three out of every 100 people will experience a psychotic episode at some time in their lives. Most people who do have a psychosis will make a full recovery from the experience. Psychosis is most likely to occur when someone is in their late teens and early twenties.

What are the signs and symptoms of psychosis?

If you experience psychosis, you will find your thoughts are very muddled and you may find it hard to communicate. The psychosis can distort senses, making it very difficult for you to tell what is real from what's not real. This can make it difficult to cope in everyday situations and especially when socialising. This can cause people to behave in a different way than they normally do.

One of the key signs of psychosis is that the person may not realise that there is a problem. At the time it is hard to understand that other people are not going through the same experiences.

Hearing voices is the most common symptom of psychosis and is actually a very common experience. The voices may be the voices of people you know like friends and family or you might not recognise them. You may be responding to voices while others cannot see who you are talking to and are becoming worried about you. Other symptoms can include unusual ideas which can at times be delusions – where you believe things that are not true. Most of us have at times been a bit paranoid about others, but for people with psychosis, the fear can be terribly limiting. Other unusual thoughts can include ideas about special powers or abilities, belief that there is something wrong with their body or religious beliefs that are not typical for that person.

How can I get help?

Getting help as early as possible is really important as treating psychosis early and learning a lot about it can really help you to get better quicker and prevent you from having a relapse in the future. If you think that you may need help, then it is best to speak to someone you trust and you should contact your doctor as they will make sure you get the help you need.

Psychosis is usually helped by medication and 'talking therapies' which help you to understand what is happening and find ways to cope with it.

VISIT THESE USEFUL WEBSITES

www.kooth.com

Free online counselling and support

www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/mental-health/hearing-voices/

Webpage from Childline about hearing voices and where to get help and support

www.nhs.uk/conditions/psychosis/

NHS Choices webpage provides information and advice about psychosis

www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/psychosis/

Youngminds charity webpage for children and young people's mental health

[Early Intervention in Psychosis Service - North Cumbria Patient Information Leaflet - Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust \(cntw.nhs.uk\)](#)

Early Intervention in Psychosis Service which offers help to people aged 14-65 years who are experiencing first symptoms of psychosis, as well as providing help to their families

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/parents-and-young-people/young-people/psychosis---for-young-people

Webpage from the Royal College of Psychiatrists aimed at young people about psychosis