

## *Suggestions to Help Yourself Recover from Psychosis*

### **Introduction**

Psychosis is a very individual experience and there is no magic formula to guarantee that everyone involved will emerge unscathed. The right kind of professional help is extremely beneficial in aiding recovery. The person with psychosis can play an active part. It is important to discover the things that make it better or worse and how to control them.

The leaflet below outlines some specific suggestions for practical activities that a person with psychosis can do themselves that may help some people both during an acute episode and in the longer term. They have been proposed by someone who has personal experience of psychosis and could be used either while waiting to receive professional help or alongside treatment. Try to adapt them to suit your situation and don't worry about trying to do them all. If one or two are useful this is progress towards moving on and regaining control over your life.

### **Surviving a Psychotic Episode**

This can be a frightening and confusing time for everyone, especially while waiting to receive professional help. Support from family, friends and professionals can help you get through it.

- Find some places that you feel safe. You can help by making your environment relaxing and unstimulating. Keep lights low, turn off the TV, Reduce noise such as vacuuming and DIY.
- If you feel disorientated it may be better to stay close to home. However if you feel agitated, you might find it helpful to go for a walk somewhere quiet.
- Get in touch with people you can trust and ask them to stay with you if you don't want to be on your own.
- Find a way to communicate important information about your priorities (e.g work, college, family) to people who are trying to help.
- You could keep some notes about how you are feeling. Don't feel pressured to share them with anyone else.
- Try to stick to routine as much as possible, eating, washing and going to bed as normal even if it is difficult to sleep.
- Listening to music or relaxation CDs may be helpful. Use headphones if necessary.
- Any activities that aid relaxation such as a hot bath are helpful.

## Recovering From Psychosis

*The way that you react to your experiences can make a real difference to helping you move on in the long term.*

### Acceptance and Awareness

Accept that you may need to allow yourself time to recover fully.

Work with carers and professionals to negotiate some time out from work and studies. It is much better to take some time out and work on recovering than try to carry on and end up messing up your studies or relationship with your employer.

As you start to recover you might find it helpful to take it one day at a time. This might sound like a cliché but it may not be too beneficial to dwell on the past or worry about the future. As you continue to get better you may find planning for the future naturally starts to get easier.

It is helpful to have in mind something to work towards e.g returning to work or study. As you start to get better you may identify things in your situation that triggered your illness and you may want to use the experience to redirect yourself into something that suits you better.

Identify your immediate priorities and concentrate on making sure they are addressed. Ask for help with this if you need it.

At very first, especially if you still feel tired, drained or confused it may be best not to venture too far afield or to unfamiliar places. Tell someone you trust where you are going and when you will be back. As you get more practice and start to feel better you can build to longer outings and more adventurous activities. Try taking someone trusted along or ask them to collect you at the end until you feel more confident.

### Regaining Focus and Control

Getting into a routine as soon as possible can help you structure your day and you may find your thoughts follow suit. Try to go to bed, get up eat and wash at a similar time each day. This may be as much as you can manage for the first few weeks.

Try reading simple articles from magazines to concentrate your mind. Build up to books and newspapers. You may find it easier to stay away from the TV and internet at first as the screen is bright and they don't help concentration.

Techniques to structure your time and help you plan such as making lists, using a diary meticulously to record appointments and setting reminders in your phone for important events is useful. It helps you focus on what you need to do in a logical way and takes the pressure off your memory, helping to relieve stress.

You may like to keep a journal. This can help order your thoughts and show you how much progress you are making. The notes can also be used to help your treatment. You should distinguish between notes you make for yourself and those you will be happy to share with other people. Ideally keep them in a separate place.



If you are prone to flights of lots of ideas try writing a list of all the things you want to do and then pick one or two to focus on. It is probably best to stick to the simple ones to start with. Try discussing whether they would be achievable and realistic for you and if so how you might go about them with a trusted person.

## Exercise

Exercise can be very helpful. As well as physical benefits it can lift mood and help relaxation and sleep. It is also worth bearing in mind that most medication to treat psychosis can lead to weight gain. Increasing the amount of exercise you do as soon as you start medication is probably the most effective way to minimise this effect. Simple activities that can be done alone and don't require much thought such as swimming, running and walking may be best at first. You can build up to group activities with more to think about such as racket sports, team games and exercise classes.

## Physical Health

Eat healthily with lots of fruit and vegetables and try taking multivitamins, especially antioxidant vitamins A, C and E, and take omega 3, 6 and 9 fatty acid supplements (also available in vegetarian form but the best are high in a fatty acid called EPA which are not). Drink green tea.

Try to cut down on alcohol. Sticking only to the drinks you really like even if they are more expensive so it is a special treat can help. Better quality drinks often give you less of a hangover as well!

Get any necessary health and dental check ups and treatments. You may be able to get help with arranging these and any related costs. Also get support if you find any of this stressful (e.g the dentist). In the long run knowing you have taken care of your health can reduce stress.

Try to reduce smoking it can make you jittery as well as being draining and bad for you generally.

Cut out recreational drugs. You don't need anything that could destabilise your thoughts, feelings, energy levels, brain and body right now. If this has been a big part of your life you may need to find some new friends or at least change some of your relationships. If you are tempted try to remember how bad you could feel afterwards, how much progress you have made and what you have to lose. Ask yourself if it is worth it given the likely short lived effect of the drugs. Remind yourself that you have been there and done that.

## Look After Your Appearance

Spend some time on yourself. Buy some new clothes, get a hair cut, have a facial, visit a spa, find a scent you really like. This doesn't have to be expensive, you could clothes swap with friends or visit charity shops, go for a haircut on a training day and spend time grooming with a few cheap products. If you are off work or college you will be able to take advantage of off peak rates and have more time to hunt out bargains.



## Friendships and Social

Just like any other times when major changes in your life occur you may need to accept that your friendships and social circle may be affected. Some friendships will last all the way through and become stronger, some may end, some flounder temporarily and get better and you may even form new ones in unexpected places.

If you find people contact difficult try meeting one person for a short fixed period of time in a place you feel comfortable and safe. Before you meet think of a couple of questions to ask them and a couple of things you want to say. You can build up to longer meetings and seeing people in larger groups and different environments.

It may be best for everyone concerned at first if you stay away from friends experiencing a lot of emotional difficulties until you feel stronger. None of you are likely to benefit from a highly emotional interaction at the moment. If you are worried what they will think of you shutting them out try sending a note or text to wish them well, letting them know you will be in touch when you feel better. As you recover and become more aware of your emotional limitations you may find you are able to offer better support to people in distress. It is worth identifying unequal relationships and either addressing the problems or avoiding the people. You may need help from trusted people or professionals to do this.

You may be very worried about how things you have done or said while psychotic might be seen by others. Remember you have been temporarily out of control of your thoughts, many people choose to inflict this state on themselves every weekend yet somehow this is seen as culturally acceptable! You could try swapping 'most embarrassing' stories with people you trust. Do you think any less of them after what they have said? Are yours really any different or worse than theirs? If you feel they are different somehow (unlikely!) what can you learn from this?

Undertaking stress free enjoyable activities, alone or in a group with as many people as you feel comfortable can be useful. You could try growing plants, following a recipe, taking photos, painting pictures, going for walks, writing, sewing, making or fixing things. These things can help you socialise, focus your thoughts, usefully occupy your time and get a sense of achievement. If you take up new activities you are less likely to feel frustrated if things take longer to master than they might have done before. This may get easier as you recover and it is a good idea to start small and build up, e.g grow some herbs in a window box before deciding to landscape the garden!

## Take Control Over Your Immediate Environment

It might help you control and organise your thoughts if you rationalise your physical environment and organise your things.

Start by tidying up one job at a time. Take a rest after each task and set deadlines for completing them.

Try arranging your books, papers or CDs in alphabetical or subject order.

Go through and clear out things you don't need. Throw them away or give them to charity. If, during your psychosis, you hoarded objects or newspaper/magazine cuttings maybe keep one or two as a souvenir of this time in your life but throw rest away. You may want to get a friend to help you and confirm that your choices are rational.

If you are feeling more adventurous try reorganising or decorating a room so it feels very calm and relaxing. Choose calming colours, comfortable furnishing and a few pictures that you find calming. Pay attention to soft lighting and reducing noise. Again get a friend to help you.

### **Find Things to Help You Relax**

There is lots of advice available about deep breathing, yoga and meditation. However, it can be simpler than this. Maybe just focus on spending a little time each day in a place you feel calm, try listening to a relaxing song, burning some relaxing essential oils such as lavender or have a massage.

For a quick fix at work or out and about take a walk to somewhere quiet and spend a few minutes there or make and drink a cup of calming tea e.g camomile (some of these are nicer than others, you may need to try a few!).

### **Understanding What Happened and Moving On**

Learning about psychosis and different approaches to understanding and treating it can be useful. However there are a wide range of approaches and opinions. It is best to adopt a critical approach and draw on the ideas that help you move forward with your life.

You might want to spend some time reflecting on who you are and what you are like. Try writing down your top ten likes and dislikes, favourite and least favourite places and activities. Try comparing lists with other people you trust. You may find this reassuring as others may share your concerns. It could also help you identify situations you could learn to handle differently.

When you look back over the events that lead up to your psychotic episode you will start to recognise events and situations that lead up to it and the thoughts, feelings and behaviours that warned something was wrong.

Understanding the things you are sensitive to and how you respond can help you understand when and how your risk of psychosis might be increased.

Once you understand your patterns you try to build in measures to counteract the stress, e.g book a massage before a job interview or go out for dinner after a hospital appointment.