

Module 12:

My treatment options



**This module will show you
the treatments that you can
choose from.**

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Plan for today's session

How was your week?

What would you like to talk about today?

Evaluating today's session

Summary of what we talked about today

What will I do during the week?

How was today for me?

Name: _____ Date: _____



Your treatment options

There are many treatments you can use to help manage your experience and work towards recovery.

Research suggests:

- people who contact their mental health services early for treatment recover more quickly
- people who use medication, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and family therapy all together are more likely to recover

You should contact your mental health services as soon as you need to and take advantage of all the treatments that are available to you.

What mental health services are available?

Many different types of doctors, nurses and therapists work in your local mental health services. They work with you to develop a treatment programme that is based on your personal needs. Your local mental health service will offer some or all of the treatments and services listed here. If you are not sure if your service offers a particular treatment, please ask.

Meeting with doctors and nurses

Most mental health services give you the opportunity to meet regularly with a doctor and a nurse.

First, you will meet a doctor. The doctor will:

- get to know you so they can discuss possible diagnoses with you
- talk to you about the treatments that might be best for you

The doctor may also ask a nurse to work with you to:

- offer advice and support
- monitor how your medicine affects you
- check that your treatment plan is successful
- help you and your family with education and support

Doing coping skills work

Coping skills work is a type of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for psychosis is based on understanding:

- how people make sense of their experiences
- why some people become very distressed by them

Coping skills work aims to increase:

- what you know about your experiences
- your ability to cope with your experiences

If you decide to do coping skills work, you will work with a coping skills therapist for about three months.

Meeting with a social worker

Mental health social workers collaborate with service users to identify and problem solve psycho-social issues which impact on mental wellness. This can include family issues, issues relating to the care of children, concerns about abuse and domestic violence and access to housing and social welfare entitlements. Social workers can help you find solutions to these problems.

Meeting with an occupational therapist

Occupational therapy helps you do the everyday things you want and need to do. An occupational therapist can help you work out how to:

- manage daily tasks
- get back to work or
- take up training

If you think this would help you, ask your mental health service if you could work with an occupational therapist.

Choosing a talk therapy

Talk therapies can help you understand your experiences and develop coping strategies to deal with them.

If you attend talk therapy, you will see a psychologist or psychotherapist. Here are some talking therapies that your mental health service might offer.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for psychosis is based on understanding:

- how people make sense of their experiences
- why some people become very distressed by them

Your CBT therapist will try to help you identify the unhelpful thinking and emotions you have. After this, your therapist will try to help you develop other thoughts and emotions that are more realistic and balanced.

Your CBT therapist may encourage you to consider different ways of understanding what is happening to you. They will try to help you achieve goals that are meaningful and important to you

Behavioural family therapy

Behavioural family therapy is a way of helping you and your family to cope better with your condition. After you have an episode of psychosis, you may rely on your family members for their care and support. While most family members are happy to help, the stress of caring for somebody can place a strain on any family.

Family therapy involves informal meetings that take place over six months. At meetings, you, your therapist and your family may:

- discuss information about your condition, such as what treatments are available and how your condition might progress
- explore ways of supporting you
- decide how to solve practical problems that can be caused by psychosis, such as planning how to manage a psychotic episode

Going to support groups or organisations

If you are experiencing episodes of psychosis, a self-help group can offer extra support. It may help you to be around others who have been through similar experiences.

Peer-led support groups

Peer-led support groups are led by people with psychosis.

The EOLAS Project

The EOLAS Project provides two learning programmes which provide mental health information: one for people with a diagnosis of schizophrenia or bipolar disorder and another for their families and friends. The programmes are presented by a person who has a diagnosis and a therapist or doctor.

WRAP® groups

WRAP stand for Wellness Recovery Action Plan. WRAP is based on the experiences of people with mental health issues. It is a self-management plan, and there are groups that provide training and support.

Hearing voices groups

Hearing Voices Ireland (HVI) works to help people understand and accept voice hearing as a valid human experience. There are self-help groups around the country for people who hear voices.

Shine

Shine is the national organisation dedicated to upholding the rights and addressing the needs of anyone affected by mental ill health. They offer support groups, an information helpline, counselling and resource centres.

Taking medication

Your doctor may recommend that you take medicine to help your condition. There are four types of psychiatric medication that might be prescribed for you.

Antipsychotics

Antipsychotic medicines are usually the first line treatment for psychosis. Antipsychotics generally work by blocking the effect of dopamine, a chemical that transmits messages in the brain.

There are two main types of antipsychotics.

- Typical antipsychotics - the first generation of antipsychotics that were developed during the 1950s.
- Atypical antipsychotics - a newer generation of antipsychotics that were developed during the 1990s.

Your doctor will usually provide atypical antipsychotics because they are less likely to cause side effects. They are not suitable or effective for everyone as the side effects can affect people differently.

How does the medication work?

Doctors think that psychosis is caused by a chemical imbalance in people's brain, particularly with dopamine. Currently, doctors think that too much dopamine can cause an increase in activity in the limbic region of the brain – the emotional. This might cause psychotic experiences. The medication will block the effect of the dopamine.

How do I take antipsychotics?

There are different ways of taking antipsychotics.

- By mouth as a tablet or liquid
- As a slow-release injection that you take every two to six weeks
- As a quick-acting injection that is given when someone is very distressed, violent or aggressive to help them calm down, usually in hospital.

In general, you need to take only one antipsychotic medicine at a time unless you are changing medicines.

What are the benefits of antipsychotic medicine?

Many studies show that 70% of people who take antipsychotic medicine get relief from their hallucinations and delusions. Many doctors feel that taking antipsychotic medication regularly stop hallucinations and delusions from coming back.

When can I stop taking antipsychotic medicine?

If you would like to stop taking your medicine, talk to your doctors. Most doctors are willing to make a plan to reduce or stop medicine especially if you have not had distressing experiences for some time.

What are the disadvantages of antipsychotic medicine?

All medicine has side effects, and you should think about these when you are discussing medication with your doctor.

Not everyone gets side effects, and different people can have different side effects from the same medicine. Also, a side effect that is too severe for one person might not bother another person, especially if their psychotic distressing experiences have got better.

Common side effects of antipsychotic medication include weight gain, feeling drowsy, muscle stiffness, and tremor. Most side effects can be reduced by changing the dosage or making changes to the medication regime. For a full list of side effects, see the patient information leaflet that comes with your medicine and discuss any concerns with your doctor. If you notice anything unusual, talk about it with your doctor or nurse. They will help you think about your options.

What is Clozapine?

If you have tried different antipsychotic medicines and they haven't helped, your doctor might suggest the medicine Clozapine. There is evidence to suggest it often works when other medicine doesn't.

Clozapine is not prescribed first because it has a side effect that can be serious – agranulocytosis. In this condition, your white blood count lowers suddenly and severely. This would mean you may pick up infections easier and get sick. This happens to about one in every 100 people who take Clozapine. Because of this, if you take Clozapine, you need to have regular blood tests.

Mood stabilisers

Mood stabilisers are usually given to people who experience mood swings or people diagnosed with bipolar or schizoaffective disorder. The most common mood stabilisers are:

- lithium carbonate
- valproate
- carbamazepine and lamotrigine.

Blood levels of lithium need to be checked every 3 months and this may reduce the risk of side effects. Valproate, carbamazepine and lamotrigine are also used to treat epilepsy and to prevent seizures. Anti-epilepsy drugs can cause deformities in babies. They are not prescribed for women at risk of becoming pregnant unless they are using effective contraceptive methods.

Antidepressants

Antidepressants are most often used to treat depression, but can be helpful when you are recovering from psychosis. There are different types but most will boost the actions of chemicals such as serotonin and noradrenaline in the brain.

- Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), such as fluoxetine, paroxetine, sertraline and citalopram/escitalopram, boost the action of serotonin.
- They commonly cause nausea, headache, sweating and insomnia in the first days of treatment that then wear off.
- Serotonin and Noradrenergic Reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs) such as Venlafaxine and Duloxetine. They cause similar side effects to the SSRIs.
- Tricyclics such as amitriptyline, imipramine and clomipramine, which are sometimes more effective but are more likely to cause drowsiness and dry mouth as side effects.
- Other types include Agomelatine, Mirtazapine, Trazadone which have similar actions but slightly different side effects

Anxiolytics

Anxiolytics are medicines that reduce feelings of anxiety. Benzodiazepines are the most common anxiolytics and include medicines such as diazepam (Valium), lorazepam (Ativan) and alprazolam (Xanax). Anxiolytics can be addictive, and people can become dependent on them very quickly. If you stop anxiolytics, you may quickly become anxious and agitated again. Nobody chooses to become dependent on anxiolytic medication, but if this happens it is a problem you should discuss with your team who can help you.

Tips to help you discuss treatment with your doctor

- Before you visit your doctor, fill in the worksheet **Talking to your doctor**.
- Bring a notepad and pencil with you so you can write down important information.
- If it will help you, take someone else with you when you go to the doctor. This person can make you feel more comfortable, remind you of your questions or take notes for you.
- Ask your doctor questions. Here are some suggestions.
 - Is there another treatment that is suitable for me? This question is important if you are having distressing side effects from your medicine.
 - Are there any information leaflets about my medicine or therapies that might help me?
 - Are there any support groups in my area that can help me, my friends or my family?
- Remember your physical health too. You might be visiting your doctor about psychosis, but if you have other problems or questions, talk about them too.

These tips were originally developed by Detect Ireland.

Talking to your doctor

Worksheet

Fill in this worksheet before you see your doctor. It will help you remember what you want to talk about.

My distressing experiences	How I describe it	How often it happens

List all the other illnesses you have and any you had before you were diagnosed with psychosis.

List all the medicines you take. Include medicines your doctor prescribes and medicines you buy yourself, such as supplements and remedies.

Medicine	Dosage	How often I take it

My questions for my doctor

Name: _____ Date: _____

My treatment options

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Worksheet

Use this worksheet to think about what treatments you use now and what ones you would like to think about. Tick each box.

Attending mental health services

	Yes	No	Maybe
Meeting the doctor			
Meeting the nurse			
Doing coping skills work			
Seeing the occupational therapist			
Seeing the social worker			

Doing talk therapies

	Yes	No	Maybe
Doing individual therapy			
Doing cognitive behavioural therapy			
Getting my family involved in behavioural family therapy			

Attending groups or support organisations

	Yes	No	Maybe
Attending EOLAS or WRAP groups			
Attending Hearing Voices Ireland support groups			
Attending Shine			
Attending another support group			

My treatment options

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Using medicines

	Yes	No	Maybe
Discussing my options with my doctor and nurse			
Finding out what works for me			
Taking the medicine that I have been prescribed			

Other things for me to consider – write in your ideas

	Yes	No	Maybe

Name: _____ Date: _____