

# Cognitive difficulties and Psychosis

## Thinking about thinking



## What are the main aspects of cognition?



### Executive Function

Planning & prioritising  
Responding to our environment  
Making decisions  
Moving between tasks  
Sequencing, planning & organising tasks



### Learning & Memory

Being able to record information, such as facts or events and retrieve it when needed



### Complex Attention

Focusing on more than one thing  
Deciding what to pay attention to and what to ignore



### Perceptual-Motor Control

Coordinating our bodies movements in response to what is going on around us



### Social Cognition

Understanding beliefs and emotions of others



### Language

Naming objects  
Finding the right words  
Fluidity & flow of speech  
Understanding others

# Cognition and Psychosis

## thinking about our thinking

### Does cognition change after an episode of psychosis?

Some people experience changes in cognition as part of psychosis. A recent study<sup>2</sup> described common cognitive challenges in early psychosis in the areas of:

**working memory** e.g. if someone is giving you a phone number, holding the numbers in your mind long enough to be able to write them down.

**processing speed** e.g. taking longer to respond to a question, e.g. if someone asks you for your phone number

**verbal learning** understanding and recalling spoken or written information e.g. remembering a list of instructions

This study also highlights the **individuality** of cognition - the idea that every person has their own **cognitive 'profile'** i.e. unique areas of Strength and areas of challenge. Cognitive strengths and challenges can occur together e.g. 'my memory is good but I'm having some trouble keeping up in conversation with others and I'm finding it difficult to concentrate'



### Does everyone with psychosis experience cognitive difficulties?

Not everyone will experience changes in cognition after psychosis, for those that do it's important to have an understanding of your cognitive 'profile'

What's going well? What areas do I need support with?

Why is this important? Research shows that cognition plays an important role in how someone recovers after an episode of psychosis.<sup>3</sup> Learning to address cognitive challenges can give you an extra tool in your recovery toolbox.

### What to do if I notice changes in my cognition?



Make a note of the changes you are noticing. Try to be specific and use examples of everyday tasks that are impacted. Sometimes it might be useful to ask family members or those you live with if they have also noticed the same changes. Write them down or make a note on your phone. This may make it easier when explaining any changes to your clinical team.



Talk to a member of your clinical team about the changes you are noticing.



Depending on the changes you are experiencing your team may support you in a variety of ways: completing a brief cognitive assessment to gather more information, recommending practical strategies to assist with everyday life, referring to another team member who may do an assessment or provide specific support.

1. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed)*. (2013). . American Psychiatric Association.

2. Stainton, A., Chisholm, K., Griffiths, S. L., Kambaitz-Illankovic, L., Wenzel, J., Bonivento, C., ... Wood, S. J. (2023). Prevalence of cognitive impairments and strengths in the early course of psychosis and depression. *Psychological Medicine*, 53(13), 5945–5957. doi:10.1017/S0033291723001770

3. Cowman, M., Holleran, L., Lonergan, E., O'Connor, K., Birchwood, M., & Donohoe, G. (2021). Cognitive Predictors of Social and Occupational Functioning in Early Psychosis: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Data. *Schizophrenia bulletin*, 47(5), 1243–1253. <https://doi.org/10.1093/schbul/sbab033>