



LET'S TALK ABOUT PSYCHOSIS

What causes Psychosis?

Well... we're still working to fully understand the actual causes of psychosis. Right now, there's nothing we can pinpoint as a definite cause, but we do know about a variety of things that act as risk factors to increase your chance of developing psychosis.

For example, genetics is an important factor. If you have a parent or sibling with psychosis, you are more likely to develop it than if there is no family history.

Using illegal drugs such as marijuana, cocaine or crystal meth can also significantly increase your risk. Developmental factors like trauma during your birth or experiencing childhood abuse or mistreatment can also increase your likelihood of developing psychosis. Lastly, social factors such as growing up in an urban environment or if you or your parents are immigrants can also increase the risk.

Another way of explaining how people develop psychosis is through something called the Stress Vulnerability model. The idea is that while anyone can develop psychosis, some people are more susceptible than others. The chance of developing psychosis depends on how vulnerable you are to developing psychosis combined with the degree of stress you're experiencing. Someone who is very vulnerable may only need a little stress like smoking marijuana to trigger psychosis. Whereas, for someone who has low vulnerability, it might take a major stress like a severe trauma to trigger psychosis.

This animation on our website will help you further understand how this model works. It uses the metaphor of a Stress Vulnerability bucket, developed by Dr. Alison Brabban. We've included the script for that video below, in case you'd rather read about it.



The Stress Bucket Analogy

Stress is a normal part of life. Effectively managing stress is important to feeling well, and avoiding mental health problems.

Stress overload is one of the factors that can trigger psychosis. We all have different capacities for stress in our lives. Think of this bucket as your capacity.

Your bucket may be large or small. Everyone's is a different size, based on their genetic and social backgrounds, and events in their lives.

See this faucet? It represents all the sources of stress in life: school, work, relationships, finances, moving your home...and so many more things. Stress results from positive experiences as well as negative ones. And nobody's life is stress-free.

As long as your bucket can hold the amount of stress in your life, you're handling it all fine. It's when your bucket overflows that things can go wrong. So it's important to stop that from happening.

Having a big bucket means you can tolerate lots of stress. Or if it's small, you're more affected by stress. And while you can't change the size of your bucket, you can change the way you manage stress to reduce the flow, such as avoiding work overload, or making time to relax.

It's also important to have strategies for reducing stress, so it won't overwhelm you. Positive ways of coping, like regular exercise, getting enough sleep, relaxing, sharing your feelings, or even medications prescribed by your doctor can help lower the level of stress in your bucket... like punching holes in it for the stress to drain out.



It's also important to keep those holes from getting blocked. Using street drugs like marijuana or study drugs, overusing alcohol, or not sleeping enough can be like putting corks into the holes.

And sometimes, even without these stress factors... a person's stress vulnerability can be so great—in other words, their bucket is so small— that even the ordinary stresses of day-to-day life can be too much.

And when a person experiences more stress than his or her bucket can hold, psychosis can result.

That's why it's important to recognize the signs of stress in yourself or someone you care about and to take positive steps and measures that keep that stress from building up. The sooner, the better.

Remember: Your mind matters. And controlling stress is an important way you can protect your mental health, along with your physical wellbeing.