

# Exercise & First-Episode Psychosis

Moving your body is one of the most genuinely useful things you can do during recovery from psychosis — not because it's easy, but because the evidence for it is strong and the benefits are real.

*“You don’t have to be sporty, fit, or even motivated to start. Exercise helps people in early psychosis in ways that go far beyond physical health — and it works even when everything feels hard.”*

## WHY IT MATTERS

**Exercise is one of the most evidence-backed things you can do for your recovery,** not just for your body, but for your mood, thinking, and sleep.

## WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

**Regular physical activity helps reduce negative symptoms, improve memory and concentration,** and counteract some of the side effects of antipsychotic medication.

## THE GOOD NEWS

**You don’t need to be fit to start.** Small, consistent movement matters more than intensity, and any increase from where you are now makes a difference.

## WHAT’S ACTUALLY HAPPENING

- 1 Psychosis and medication can make you less active.** Fatigue, low motivation, and some side effects make it genuinely harder to get moving. This is a real barrier — not laziness — and it’s worth naming it.
- 2 Exercise directly helps the brain.** Physical activity boosts brain chemicals that support mood, memory, and motivation — often depleted in early psychosis. Studies show that people with FEP who exercise regularly improve their concentration and thinking speed.
- 3 It can help manage medication side effects.** Antipsychotics can cause weight gain and metabolic changes from early in treatment. Exercise is one of the most effective ways to counteract this, and it’s easier to start sooner rather than later.
- 4 It can reduce symptoms directly.** Research shows exercise reduces negative symptoms — like low energy, withdrawal, and flat mood — in ways medication alone often doesn’t. It also helps with sleep and anxiety.

## WHAT MIGHT HELP

### START SMALL AND BUILD SLOWLY

A 5-minute walk counts. The goal isn’t to get fit overnight — it’s to build a habit. Even getting outside once a day is a meaningful starting point.

### FIND SOMETHING YOU DON’T HATE

Exercise doesn’t have to mean the gym. Walking, dancing, swimming, cycling, yoga, team sports — the best form of exercise is one you’ll do.

### ASK YOUR TEAM TO HELP YOU GET STARTED

Many early intervention services can refer you to exercise programs or services designed specifically for people going through psychosis — non-judgmental and at your own pace.

### ACT BEFORE YOU FEEL MOTIVATED

Negative symptoms make it hard to feel motivated to do anything — including exercise. Starting before you feel ready is often the only way. Even five minutes can shift how you feel.

### Struggling to get started is normal

Low motivation is a symptom of psychosis, not a character flaw. Be gentle with yourself. Any movement is progress, and it genuinely does get easier.

### You don’t have to do it alone

Exercising with someone — a friend, family member, or in a group — makes it much more likely to happen. Social connection and movement together are a powerful combination.

### Now is a good time to start

Early psychosis is an ideal time to build exercise habits, before other health complications set in. Starting now can have lasting benefits for your long-term health.