

# Nutrition & First-Episode Psychosis

Eating well when you're going through psychosis — and starting new medication — isn't always easy. But what you eat has a real impact on how you feel, and there's support available to help.

*“Increased hunger and weight gain are common and recognized effects of antipsychotic medication — they are not a sign of weakness or poor choices. Understanding what's driving them is the first step to doing something about it.”*

## SOMETHING TO KNOW

**Antipsychotic medication can increase appetite and cause weight gain**, especially in the early weeks of treatment. This is biological, not a lack of willpower.

## WHY IT MATTERS

**Weight gain in early psychosis is linked to long-term heart health and wellbeing**, but it's also one of the areas where early action makes the biggest difference.

## THE GOOD NEWS

**Small, practical changes to what you eat can genuinely help** — and you don't need to follow a strict diet or give up all the food you enjoy.

## WHAT'S ACTUALLY HAPPENING

### 1 Your medication increases hunger — really.

Most antipsychotics can leave you feeling hungry even after eating and create strong cravings for high-sugar, high-fat foods. This is a recognized side effect, not a lack of self-control.

### 2 Weight gain can happen very quickly at first.

Young people starting antipsychotic treatment for the first time are especially vulnerable to rapid weight gain during the first weeks and months. Being aware of this from the start makes it easier to respond early.

**3 What you eat affects how you feel and think.** A diet rich in vegetables, whole grains, and protein supports brain function, energy, and mood. Ultra-processed foods and high sugar intake are linked to worsened mood and fatigue — which can be harder to notice when you're already unwell.

### 4 Nutrition can also support recovery directly.

Emerging research suggests that anti-inflammatory foods, such as vegetables, oily fish, nuts, and legumes, may help with the brain changes involved in psychosis, though this remains an active area of research.

## WHAT MIGHT HELP

### DON'T RESTRICT — FOCUS ON WHAT TO ADD

Trying to eat less when you're experiencing increased hunger is hard. Instead, try adding nutritious foods, such as vegetables, protein, and wholegrains, that help manage appetite without strict rules.

### EAT REGULARLY THROUGHOUT THE DAY

Skipping meals often leads to stronger cravings and larger portions later. Eating at regular times — even small amounts — helps stabilize blood sugar and reduces the urge to snack heavily.

### TALK TO YOUR TEAM ABOUT YOUR WEIGHT

Weight changes from medication are a legitimate concern. Your team can monitor your weight and metabolic health, refer you to a dietitian, or discuss whether your medication has options that suit you better.

### SMALL SWAPS ADD UP

You don't need to overhaul everything at once. Swapping sugary drinks for water, adding vegetables to one meal a day, or choosing a protein-rich snack instead of one high in sugar. These small changes make a real difference over time.

### Weight gain isn't your fault

Antipsychotic-induced hunger is a real physiological effect. Shame and self-blame make it harder to make changes. Understanding what's causing it is a much better starting point.

### Now is the best time to act

Weight gain occurs most quickly in the early weeks of treatment. Getting support with nutrition early — before habits become established — has the greatest impact on long-term health.

### Cooking may feel hard

Low motivation and fatigue make cooking feel impossible. Simple options, like frozen vegetables, eggs, and wholegrains, are nutritious and require little effort or expense.