

Sleep & First-Episode Psychosis

Sleep is one of the things most affected by psychosis and one of the things that can make the biggest difference to how you feel. This sheet explains what's going on and what might help.

“Struggling to sleep when you’re going through psychosis is incredibly common. It’s not a sign that you’re doing something wrong — and there are real things that can help.”

SOMETHING TO KNOW

Sleep problems often show up before other symptoms of psychosis — you’re not imagining it, and it’s not your fault.

HOW COMMON IS IT

Sleep difficulties are one of the most common experiences for people going through a first episode — you are far from alone.

THE GOOD NEWS

Getting better sleep can genuinely help reduce other symptoms too — it’s one of the most actionable parts of your recovery.

WHAT’S ACTUALLY HAPPENING

1 Your brain is going through real changes.

Psychosis affects parts of the brain involved in regulating sleep. This makes sleeping harder in ways that aren’t down to habits or willpower.

2 Sleep and symptoms affect each other.

Symptoms like racing thoughts, voices, or feeling unsafe at night make sleep harder. And when sleep suffers, symptoms often feel worse the next day.

3 Sleep problems often come first. For many people, difficulty sleeping started before other symptoms appeared. This is a known pattern — it doesn’t mean you missed something.

4 Better sleep is possible. There are approaches that work well alongside other treatments, including talking therapies specifically designed for sleep problems in psychosis.

WHAT MIGHT HELP

TRY TO KEEP A REGULAR SCHEDULE

Going to bed and waking up at similar times — even if sleep feels broken — helps your brain find its rhythm again. Small steps count.

TALK TO YOUR CARE TEAM

Sleep is a real clinical issue, not something to push through alone. Your team may be able to adjust how you take your medication or refer you for specialist sleep support.

WIND DOWN BEFORE BED

Screens, news, and intense content can make things harder at night. A quieter hour before bed — whatever that looks like for you — can make a difference.

YOUR ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

Feeling safe enough to sleep is not a small thing. If your sleep space doesn’t feel okay, or if fears make it hard to settle, that’s worth raising with your team.

This isn’t about willpower

Sleep problems in psychosis are rooted in real brain changes during this time — not habits, not weakness. Understanding this can make it easier to ask for help.

Things do get better

As your other symptoms ease with treatment, sleep often improves too. And the reverse is true — better sleep tends to help everything else feel more manageable.

A note on cannabis and alcohol

Both are often used to help with sleep when things feel hard. Both tend to worsen sleep over time and can affect your other symptoms as well. Reducing these substances can help.