



Psychosis is not a progressive degenerative brain disease

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*Key Findings in Early Psychosis Knowledge Sharing Initiative
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Brain changes in psychosis

- Changes in tissue volume in some areas of the brain have been observed in some people with psychosis.
- Cognitive deficits have also been documented.
- Changes in brain tissue volume (and cognitive deficits) are present at first episode (and to some extent in the AT RISK stage).
- Whether these changes progress (get worse) after the first episode has been the subject of study and debate.

Do brain changes progress?

- Changes in brain tissue volume (decreases) over time may be due to factors such as:
 - Antipsychotic medication use
 - Cannabis use
 - Cigarette, alcohol, and other substance use
 - Sedentary lifestyle
 - Elevated glucocorticoid levels (associated with chronic stress)
- Recent evidence suggest that brain changes in psychosis do NOT progress after first episode.
 - [Zipursky RB1](#), [Reilly TJ](#), [Murray RM](#). The myth of schizophrenia as a progressive brain disease. [Schizophr Bull](#). 2013 Nov;39(6):1363-72

Implications for Recovery

- The idea that psychosis is a progressive disorder has, in the past, fostered a pessimistic attitude in regard to recovery among clinicians, families and people experiencing psychosis.
- The new findings support the attitude that recovery, in some form, is a realistic goal.
- Social and environmental factors can facilitate recovery, including emphasis on housing, finances, health, social relationships, and meaningful activity.
- Issues of stigma, including self-stigma, also need to be addressed.

Supporting Recovery

- Everyone working with people experiencing psychosis can:
 - **Positively influence outcomes by engendering and supporting a realistically positive attitude toward the possibility of recovery.**
- Embracing a recovery-oriented perspective can:
 - **Empower people with psychosis to see themselves as capable of living a full, contributing life in the community.**