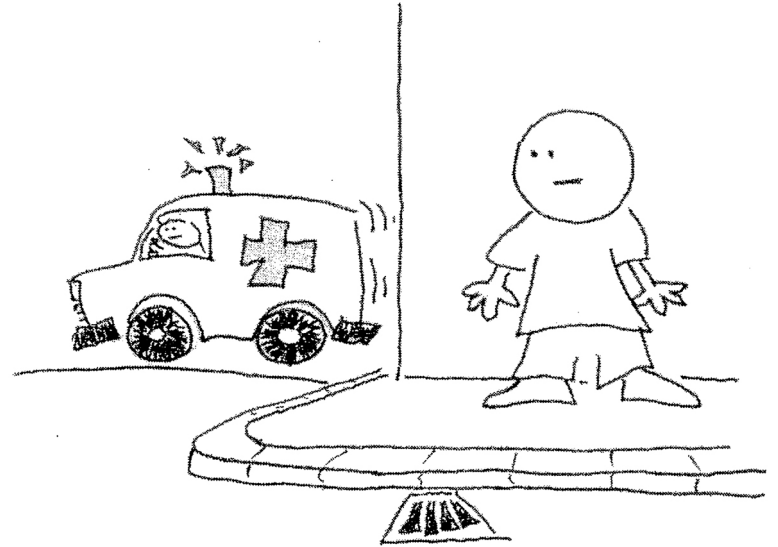


Staying Out of the Hospital:



by Jim Hindle

a guide to surviving psychosis

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Mind – works for a better life for everyone with experience of mental distress. 0845 7660163 [www,mind.org](http://www.mind.org)

Mad Pride – Celebrating mad culture & ending discrimination. 07958 907357 www.ctono.freemove.co.uk

Hearing Voices Network – Assisting people who hear voices
0161 834 5768 www.hearing-voices.org.uk

Learning From Psychosis – survivor led training workshops
0208 552 3321 www.learningfrompsychosis.com

Survivors Network – 0161 923 4877
www.survivorsnetwork.uk

Schizophrenia & Shamanism – information and techniques
www.madness.crowcity.com

Mental Health Media – promotes people's voices to reduce prejudice and discrimination 0207 700 8171
www.mhmedia.com

British Complementary Medicine Association
0845 345 5977 www.bcma.co.uk

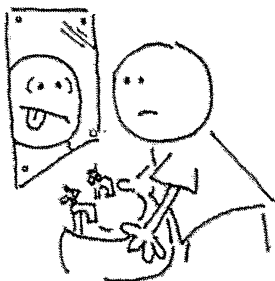
National Institute of Medical Herbalists
01392 426022 www.nimh.org.uk

Thrive – Therapeutic gardening for mental health problems
0118 988 5688 www.thrive.org.uk

The following is a series of suggestions to help people who undergo psychosis deal with the experience, and hopefully prevent the need of hospitalisation. It is aimed specifically to help with the period of psychosis itself, in its earlier and more manageable stages, though some of the advice will be applicable to maintaining positive mental health at every level. These are ultimately suggestions, based on my own experiences of psychosis and resulting reality shifts, but I hope the advice rings true across the spectrum of altered mental states. The aim is to promote a greater degree of self awareness, self control and self determination. Control your experiences, don't let them control you!

As the title suggests, it is my believe that, with the mental health services as they currently are, it is usually best if hospitalisation can be avoided. There may come a time of course where hospitalisation is the only option left, in which case good luck, and may you come through gently. But this guide is aimed at the prevention of such a state of affairs coming to pass. It is intended as a practical guide to managing the altered state of consciousness that is termed psychosis, helping you keep your head together, keep on the right side of life and keep the game on your own terms.

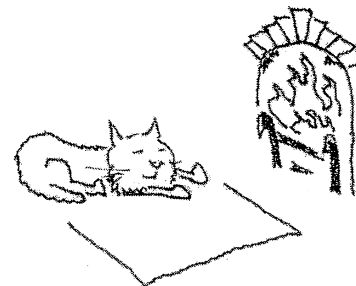
Acknowledgement and Recognition



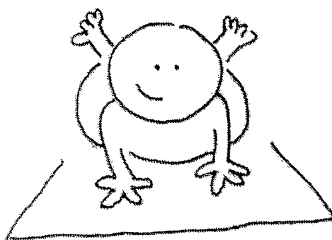
One of the most difficult things about dealing with a mental health problem is to accept that you have one in the first place. It is especially hard when your experiences feel so true, and so strong and when any harrowing times can be offset with such beautiful encounters and occurrences. I believe that psychosis is a spiritual state; potentially a time of deep and benevolent changes, where outgrown and unhealthy patterns and behaviour can be exploded and dispelled and many insights gained into the true nature of the world around us.

But it is usually an experience so overwrought that it tends to spill over into sleep loss, ensuing lack of control and perspective and, very often, resulting negative experiences. And where the early stages can be so blissful and exciting, it can feel like a crime against the world to step back from the

Ultimately, the best therapy is a loving, supportive environment, whether that be through family or friends or lovers, and we should all seek to bring that situation into being, for ourselves and for everyone around us.



Other Therapies and Practices



You might like to consider adopting a balancing practice such as meditation, tai chi or yoga. The word 'yoga' can be translated as 'tying the strands of the mind together' whereas Tai Chi helps develop a calm, alert, mental state that will help you stay centred in any circumstance. Meditation can be as simple as concentrating on slow, deep breaths and thereby calming yourself, though its benefits can be both surprising and profound.

Homeopathy, energetic healing and an awareness of your diet all have much to offer in bringing about a balanced body and mind. Nutritional deficiency is well known to enhance mental agitation, particularly in relation to omega essential fatty acids. It might also be an idea to cut out or cut down on stimulants like caffeine and alcohol.

experience and take medication that seems to cut you off from the beauty. But reining it in *is* necessary and all too often only hospitalisation spells this message out. Balance is as much in the nature of things as ecstasy, and it remains our choice whether we accept responsibility for our selves or let the world sort us out in a manner we may have little control over.

Early Warning Signs



How then, do you recognise the imbalance when it arises and take steps to control it while you can? The following points I hope are helpful whether you have suffered psychosis many times or never at all:

Becoming over emotional. You may find yourself becoming suddenly and almost overwhelmingly emotional in a way that

is uncharacteristic. This may be no bad thing, but it might also be a time to seek help, or at least be on your guard.

Not sleeping. Sometimes, particularly if we like a drink, we might find ourselves waking early in the morning after only a few hours sleep, or else sleeping very restlessly. If this is ongoing, consider a trip to a doctor, or try herbal or other sleeping pills. We can all do a night without sleep, but most people feel the need to catch up the next day and take steps to do so. If this is not the case beware... the complete loss of the will to sleep is the first major step on the road to full blown psychosis.

Forgetting to eat. This goes hand in hand with not sleeping as a classic sign of the onset of big trouble. And the less you sleep and eat, the quicker the road downhill.

Forgetting things you thought you had memorized, like the way to a friend's house, or important phone numbers.

Awareness of influences you don't normally pick up on. Such as atmospheres, energies and underlying dynamics. This can be good or bad but is often unsettling and very difficult to describe to those around you without their disbelief or overbearing concern. This awareness may not necessarily be bad in itself, but when it comes suddenly and feels overwhelming, it is usually a sign to take caution.

A feeling of largeness, of grandness, of being in possession of a power or energy you are unaccustomed to.

Everyone's experience is different though, and it might be that only through experience of our own condition can we gain the insight to recognise when we are entering dangerous waters. You might like to compile your own list of things to look out for.

Frankincense. A powerful and invaluable oil that helps purify the air and the mind of any negative influences.

Oils that have a sedative effect on central nervous system;

Chamomile, bergamot, sandalwood, lavender, sweet marjoram, lemon balm, hops, valerian, lemon.

Nerve tonics, for strengthening nervous system;

Chamomile, clary sage, juniper, lavender, marjoram, rosemary, sweet thyme, geranium.

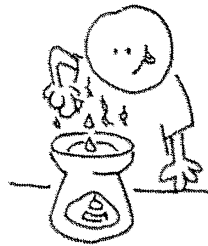
Oils that sedate nervous system but revive the spirit;

Bergamot, lemon, lemon balm.

Different oils work best for different people in different situations. Though it may sound unlikely, choosing oils whose smell you like will give the best results.

Clematis. Helps alleviate scattered attention, daydreaming or feelings of floating, distance and susceptibility to passing out.

Incenses and oils

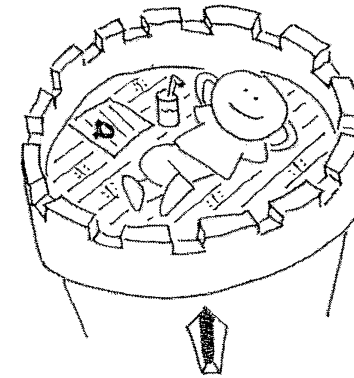


Burning incense and essential oils has a positive effect on both your mood and the atmosphere of any given space. Oil burners can be bought cheaply and are easy to use. A few drops of an essential oil can also be used in the bath or on a pillow or as part of a base oil for a massage. The general information on herbs also applies to the effect and nature of oils, which are simply the extracts of various parts of plants and trees. Look out for good, 'nag champa' incense and the following oils;

Fennel. Gives strength and courage during distressing times.

Vetiver. Balancing effect on central nervous system, instilling more centred feeling. Calms a busy mind, helps deal with mental and physical exhaustion.

Sanctuary



Once you recognise you are in trouble, you need to find a good place to get your head together. Ideally the best place to do this is your own home, but it may be that you have unsympathetic or under aware housemates or immediate family. Perhaps you have friends who might be able to offer you space and a peaceful environment for a little while? It's worth seeking out a suitable refuge beforehand, while you're still in a clear state of mind, so you'll know exactly where to go when the time comes.

These are some of the things you might want to look for;

Minimal outside intrusions (disruptive noise from neighbours etc).

A place where you can feel free to do as little as you like.

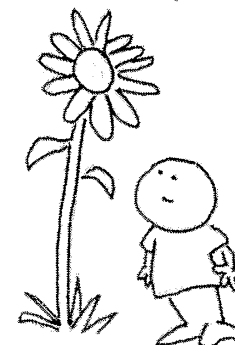
Having your meals cooked for you is a huge benefit. If you are in a place where this is impossible and where you are uncomfortable with any of the others in your house, try keeping your movements outside of your room as purposeful as possible. Do what you need to do, then return to your safe place until you feel stronger.

Things to take your mind off other things. See 'Peace' below'. Try to have what you need to hand; ie music, light reading and /or art and craft materials.

There's a lot to be said for familiar territory, though the important thing, wherever you are, is to have **a room that you can make yours**, which is there for you whenever you need it. Incense and oils can help establish a feeling of peace and safety and encourage good dreams at night (see the section on these towards the end of this booklet). Soft lighting can help induce a feeling of calm and help us wind down towards sleep.

Perhaps the most important thing is to **make the best of wherever you are**. If you feel that another place would suit you better; then by all means consider a journey to that place, if you feel up to the journey, or have someone who can take you. Remember though, it's unwise to keep running and the sooner you can stop and make a stand, the better. Have faith in yourself; you are as strong as you believe and need not fear any other thing. When you are feeling settled you will be able to see your fears for what they truly are; just harmless imaginings.

Flower Remedies



Flower remedies are different to herbs prepared as a tea or tincture as they contain only a small amount of the plant itself and work primarily with its essence. They are a subtle but powerful medicine whose effect is almost instantaneous and which can be carried around easily. Here are a few common favourites;

Rescue remedy. Helps to prevent or quickly overcome energetic trauma. Quickly restores energetic system to normal.

Aspen. A close cousin of the poplar, whose wood was used by druids for making shields. Helps promote a sense of security and dispels any negative influences.

Rock Rose. Helps calm fears and feelings of terror. Gives courage and steadfastness.

Hops. Helps poor sleepers who also suffer from dizziness, nausea and headaches. Helps with giddiness and overwrought nerves.

Valerian. Another well known herb, very useful for encouraging sleep and soothing the nervous. Stronger than chamomile and best taken with the advice of a herbalist as can be dangerous when mixed with the action of orthodox medication. A good herbal tablet, 'Valerina' is available from health food shops.

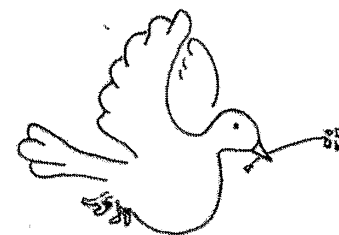
Sculleap. One of the finest nerve soothing herbs known. Conducive to quiet, gentle sleep and helpful for anyone with a fear of calamity, sudden wakefulness and night terrors.

Lavender. Good to soothe an overactive brain; for a lavender bath, take a handful of the tips of young branches, boil for about ten minutes, strain and add to bath water. The same decoction can also be used to sprinkle on a pillow before sleep.

Oats. Good for the brain, help with nervous exhaustion and keeping the mind on one subject at a time.

Passion Flower. Best taken on the advice of a herbalist. Gives a refreshing sleep for those restless and wakeful after exhaustion or who are mentally worried and overworked. Can also augment the effect of other herbs.

Peace



Establishing peace of mind is vital in order to getting settled and feeling secure and well in yourself. So if you think you might be easily disturbed by news reports or scary films or TV, isn't it best to give them a miss altogether? Remember there are always saddening things happening somewhere in the world; and yet there are so many more good things in life that never make the news. Even the sad news is often just a part of equilibrium, and shouldn't be taken too deeply to heart.

TV's and radios represent a kind of door into the outside world, albeit one where we never know quite what is coming. Psychosis can be a time of beautiful insight, so try not to let it be influenced by headlines and adverts, designed to grab attention from a population generally only half awake.

Try to focus your mind in a positive direction. Dream your beautiful dreams. Never underestimate the power of music. Select your favourite and soundest tapes and CDs while you're

feeling clear. Tried and trusted is better than guesswork and chance. Music without words is also a generally safe bet. Try writing or artwork or some other craft to help express yourself or just to unburden your mind. Even expressing the bad stuff can be good, as it helps get it out of your system.

If those around you are showing a lack of awareness in their conversation, try telling them you are feeling easily disturbed and would like to keep the conversation more positive. It may be best to avoid some people's company, in as much as you can. Remember, it's not because they are in any way 'bad.' Only that psychosis opens us up to experiencing things in a way that others often don't. Most of us, for most of our lives give only half as much thought to our words as we should. Perhaps this will change someday, but the best changes are normally slow ones.

If you find yourself troubled by any particularly disturbing thought or image, try to 'put yourself away' from it – visualise it receding from you, being swallowed in layers in dense fog, or door after door closing on it until it no longer seems threatening or close.

allow us to reach those levels. Herbs are also very appropriate for mental health as they work both physically and on an energetic, emotional level.

Here is a short list of herbs that might be found useful. It is usually best to consult a professional herbalist in the first instance, though over time you will come to know what herbs work best for you, building up a relationship with the plant that will eventually enhance its effect on your wellbeing. Herbs can be taken as tea, tinctures and sometimes as tablets.



Chamomile. A well known soothing, tranquillizing herb. A cup or three in the evening is a good habit to promote natural sleep. Also good for restlessness associated with frequent urination.

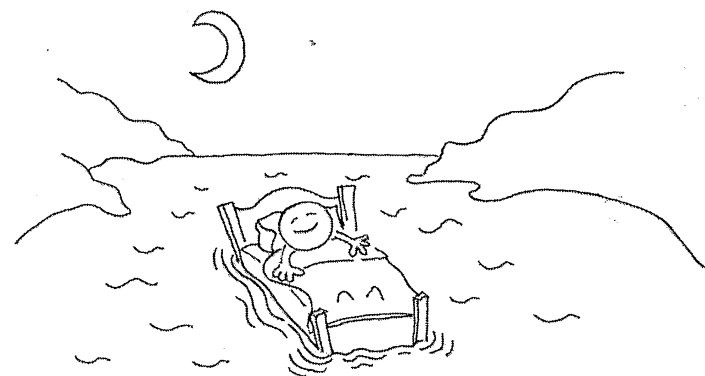
balance your mental condition. They all work best as a system of self regulation; helping to stay out of trouble in the first place, or to stop psychosis recurring once stabilised. But they can also be a great blessing during a crisis and can help steer us back from the brink of an episode. They are all offered here as suggestions, you may be drawn to some more than others; there is no particular need to try them all. They all work in different ways for different people, the important thing is to find something that works for you.

Herbalism

Using plants for their medicinal value is a practice that has been around for as long as the human race. Much of this knowledge has survived into our times, meaning a good herbalist is able to build on a body of knowledge that has been with us for hundreds, if not thousands of years. Unlike modern pharmaceuticals, which are geared to treat specific ailments, herbs will work on a number of areas at once, bringing a more rounded route to health, working on a deeper level than just alleviating symptoms of any given problem.

For those with any mental health problem, herbs can at least act as a useful counter part to modern medication, where they are not able to replace them altogether. For help in getting to sleep for instance, herbs can provide an excellent back up; they are less likely to be habit forming and will cause much less damage, if any, to the liver and kidneys. They are also better for encouraging natural sleep, enabling you to reach the different levels of sleep we need to be fully refreshed. The sleep provided by pharmaceutical sleeping pills often fails to

Sleep



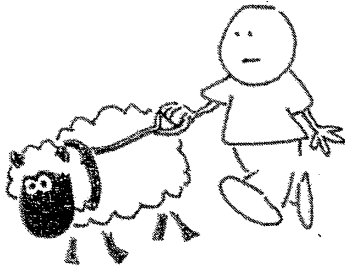
As mentioned before, the complete loss of the will to sleep is often the first step to full blown psychosis. Trying to re-establish a solid sleeping pattern is therefore a crucial part of the road back to good health. Try to wind down a few hours before sleeping; chilled music, soft lighting, no particularly strenuous physical activity. Try to avoid anything which might make your brain go into overdrive; reading something 'mindblowing' or just following thoughts to overly exciting places. Be purposefully boring. Life is exciting enough.

Try to impose a time to be going to sleep; e.g. lights out at midnight. Also, try making your mind go blank, or seeing the coming night's sleep as a heavy comforting fog that you only have to surrender yourself to. Think about any good dreams

you remember; this will help your brain step out of waking consciousness and ease the transition to the dreaming world.

If sleep remains difficult, consider some kind of sleeping tablet, or upping your dose of regular medication. Herbs can also help and there are some good herbal sleeping tablets on the market, (see section on alternative therapies below). A good night's sleep is one of the best medicines there are. Even if you can't get to sleep, or if you awake early, lying still in the dark is still a form of rest for body and brain alike. It's certainly a much better idea than running around, getting up to mischief and possibly alarming or annoying those around you.

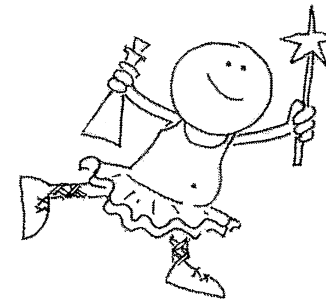
Keeping it real



Psychosis is an altered state of perception – different to what is considered normal. Remember this difference and, where necessary, try to function on both levels at the same time; the 'normal' and the not normally recognised. There may be many

- Remember to eat well; digesting a good meal helps lower mental energy.
- Steer clear of any important or over exciting events for a while, such as big parties or meetings.
- Put off major decisions.
- If over spending is a danger, consider lending your bank card and cheque to a close friend.
- Actively do things that calm you down; move slowly, talk slowly, think slowly.
- If feeling over enthusiastic, remember things that have not gone so well. Try grounding affirmations such as "I'm just one of many."

Complementary therapies



The following section contains information on a number of different therapies, any or all of which may be used to help

Sleep. Try to establish a regular sleeping pattern. Wind down in the evenings; chilled music and soft lighting will help. Consider more medication or herbal or other sleeping tablets if sleep remains difficult.

Keeping it real. Whatever your experiences, try to keep a foot in ‘social reality.’ Try to keep perspective and not place too much importance on any one idea or archetype.

Voices. Try entering into an internal dialogue with any voices. Remember your right to make your own decisions, however kindly your voices might seem. Send the bad ones packing and the good ones will tend to come through.

Resolve. When you feel ready, start to re-establish your outer activities, maybe starting with a short walk every day.

Drugs. ‘Recreational’ drugs affect people differently – if you have a mental health history they are probably best left alone. Remember that life at it’s best can be a high of it’s own, a potential that psychosis helps make us aware of. However you feel about **psychiatric medication**, at least consider its usefulness in steering you back from a crisis. Continued use might be wise for months or several years, but meditation, alternative therapies and other practices can all help create conditions where medication is no longer necessary (see next section).

Also, consider these;

strange things occurring but there is usually little to be gained in trying to describe them. It might be helpful to refer to your experiences in a seemingly vague way; a few key phrases can help you out in all kinds of situations; it was ‘*something like that*’ or ‘*it’s a long story*’ when defining something complicated or hard to believe. Having someone you trust to talk to can be a huge help though; they can help steer your ideas in a positive way and relieve you of any unfounded worries. It’s important to remember that those around you are trying to help, even if it doesn’t always seem that way.

It’s a strange world, no doubt about it, but never underestimate people’s ability not to notice what to you might seem completely obvious. Try at all times to keep a foot in everyone else’s reality; the ‘normal world’. This will ensure you act normally in their eyes and will also help temper your version of what’s going on; sometimes our attempts to rationalise what we are experiencing can stray into the realms of make believe. Distinguish between hard truths and poetic truths. Keeping tabs on the common reality helps us keep our feet amid strange waters.

Often in psychosis we experience a sense of grandeur, of being larger than everyday life, of somehow being beyond our normal selves. At times like these we tend to identify with other great figures of our culture; King Arthur or Buffy the Vampire Slayer. We can feel so full of life’s energy that equating ourselves with such figures is the only thing that makes much sense. Keep perspective; many different archetypes exist for us to relate to, it has been said that the faces of our souls can be like the many faces of a diamond, a different one coming to the fore at the appropriate time,

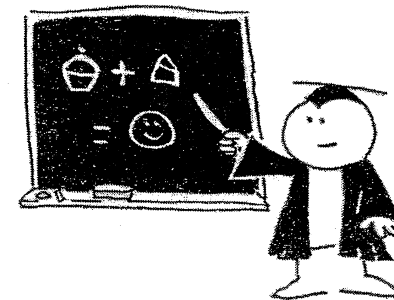
stepping into the limelight like an actor on a stage. Identify with a particular figure by all means if you find it helpful; it can be a source of great strength. But play with your archetypes and don't forget that you are simply yourself and all greater names and definitions are only a kind of game. Few truths are absolute, every answer always brings with it an element of the contrary, of the unsaid, and accepting this brings resolution.

Voices



If you are experiencing voices inside your head, a good way to cope is to enter into a kind of dialogue; treat the voices the same way you would treat anyone talking to you on the street; if they are rude, tell them to go away. If they suggest you do something, remember it is just that; a suggestion. Never feel that a voice knows better than you just because it comes out of the ether. Even a seemingly helpful voice can cause confusion

Summary



Confused? Let me run that by you again...

Acknowledgement and Recognition. Psychosis is a spiritual state, but accept that it needs keeping in some kind of balance. Make a list of early warning signs for when things begin to get out of hand.

Sanctuary. A safe place makes all the difference in keeping or getting your head together. Look for a peaceful place with understanding people and minimal commitments, or make the best of wherever you are by establishing a safe room of your own.

Peace. Try to cultivate more peace of mind, avoid TV's and radio, focus on positive things. Music is a great help. Tell people around you that you're feeling over sensitive if they are under-aware in their conversation.

intensity of your condition. There's no denying though that it can be at least handy, if not entirely indispensable. The more extreme and frequent your periods of psychosis are, the longer the road to recovery. Which is why it's well worth considering a relatively heavy dose in the initial stages of an episode, in order to head your problems off at the pass and stay out of hospital. And if the prospect of a few years on the pills is too tall an order then take them for as long as you can stomach it. But at least consider that a few years now can help prevent problems that might otherwise recur indefinitely.

Ultimately, everyone is different regarding the type and strength of the drugs they need and how long they need to stay on them for. For many, it may be best to stay on pharmaceuticals indefinitely. It's usually wise to stick with a course for at least several years, but positive thinking and action, meditation, alternative therapies and other practices can all make a real difference towards establishing and maintaining good mental health and can help create the conditions whereby modern pharmaceuticals are no longer needed.

It is important to try and find a doctor you have faith in to advise and prescribe appropriate medication, at least until you find a drug, or combination of drugs that work for you. The kind of drugs that work best for you may well only be established through trial and error and there is usually a degree of compromise in terms of balancing positive and negative effects. Remember though that half the battle is psychological and a positive attitude can make any side effects all the easier to live with, for as long as is necessary.

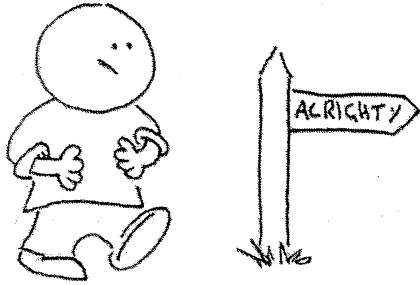
if you give it too much attention; always remember your essential liberty to make your own decisions.

You might find it easier just to ignore your voices altogether; it may be that the less attention you give them, the less hold the voices have on you. Your voices might be too loud for this to be possible though, so some kind of dialogue might be the best bet. Stand up for yourself if your voices are negative. Remember that many people who have never had mental health problems hear voices all the time. It is possible to enter into a helpful and harmonious relationship with your voices; send the bad ones packing and the good ones will tend to come through.

Don't bother talking to your voices aloud; keep any dialogue internal. You're more likely to stay out of trouble that way.

Resolve

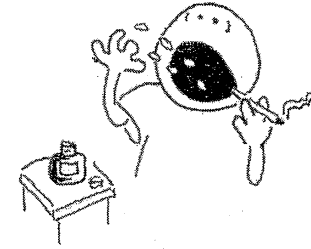
Of course, if you want to stay out of hospital long term it will, at some point, be necessary to get on with your life and face the outside world. It may be that this has been necessary all along, in the absence of a suitable sanctuary. But even if you are in a preferable place, even if it has been necessary to go into hospital, the road to recovery lies to a large part in strengthening your resolve. Give it time, be gentle with yourself, but just a short walk every day, in which you go from a defined point to another and back again, without succumbing to distraction, can do wonders for strengthening your spirit.



Know your limits, but don't be afraid to push through to a longer walk, or a trip to go shopping or whatever, when you feel ready. You might feel more secure if you have a personal stereo with you, to help filter out any possible disturbances if you are feeling vulnerable. Even this won't be needed after a time, as you regain perspective and can take any unhelpful comments or overheard conversations in your stride.

This principle; of tentatively re-establishing your capabilities applies to any activity and can help guide us back to firmer foundations. By acting 'normal', whatever the internal landscape, we 'normalise' ourselves and find our mind mends itself around the foundation of our routines.

Drugs



Recreational, mind altering drugs have been around since the dawn of time, though ancient ritualised methods of intake may be worlds apart from more modern habits. Whatever your views on these drugs, there's no denying that people take them; sometimes to their benefit, though often resulting in varying strains on their bodies and minds. Some people can cope it all their lives with seemingly little adverse effects. Others can end up hospitalised after a relatively short spell of smoking cannabis. Sometimes drugs only take their true toll after years of use. Even if you've never taken mind altering drugs, you should be aware of the dangers. You may well be a person who should steer clear of drugs altogether – if you have a mental health history, this is almost definitely the case. It's worth remembering that life itself can be a high all of its own, when we get it right. We should all take responsibility for our own health, and it's worth evaluating the effect of anything we put inside our bodies.

Pharmaceuticals. Prescribed medication can be a saviour or the bane of your life, depending on your perspective and the