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## SCHIZOPHRENIA Factsheet

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### What is virtual reality and avatar therapy?

Virtual reality is a modern computerised real-time technology using graphics, sounds and other sensory input, which creates an interactive computer-mediated world. Virtual reality applications have been primarily used for the assessment and treatment of anxieties and phobias. More recently they have been used to examine the perception of emotion and the emotional responses of people with schizophrenia during simulated social encounters, with the aim of improving social skills, cognitive functioning, and treatment adherence.

Avatar therapy uses virtual reality to recreate the faces and voices of hallucinations. Using a computer program, patients create an avatar with the help of a therapist. The avatar's voice is selected to match the voice heard by the patient. While the patient establishes dialogues with the avatar, the therapist manages the avatar so that it is gradually controlled by the patient. The avatar's mode changes from persecutory to supportive during the therapy sessions. These sessions can be recorded for the patient to take home.

### What is the evidence for virtual reality and avatar therapy?

Moderate to low quality evidence finds avatar therapy may improve general symptoms of schizophrenia and attitudes towards voices. However, there were no benefits of avatar therapy for acceptance of voices, quality of life, or treatment retention, and no benefits of virtual reality training for cognition, social skills, acceptability of treatment or study retention. Review authors suggest that these therapies need further testing in large, well-designed, and well-reported RCTs.

For further information see the technical table



*NeuRA (Neuroscience Research Australia) is one of the largest independent medical and clinical research institutes in Australia and an international leader in neurological research.*

*Diseases of the brain and nervous system pose the greatest health, economic and social burden of any disease group because they are chronic, debilitating and have no known cures.*

*Medical research is the cornerstone of efforts to advance the health and wellbeing of families and the community. Our dedicated scientists are focussed on transforming their research into significant and practical benefits for all patients.*

*While we hope you find this information useful, it is always important to discuss any questions about schizophrenia or its treatment with your doctor or other health care provider.*

## HOW YOUR SUPPORT HELPS

We are able to make significant advances due to the generosity of countless people. Your donation allows us to continue to work towards transforming lives. For information on how you can support our research, phone **1300 888 019** or make a secure donation at [neura.edu.au/donate/schizophrenia](http://neura.edu.au/donate/schizophrenia).