

Medication

Researchers believe that the symptoms of mental illness come from chemical imbalances in a person's brain. A medication works on these imbalances to reduce your symptoms, or sometimes, to relieve them completely. It is important to know the benefits of prescribed medications, as well as their potential side effects, and to talk to your doctor about any concerns that you may have. As you consider your options, some basic facts about medication.

- **Medications are not cures.** Medications only treat symptoms, so if you stop taking them, your symptoms can return. Ask your health care provider how long you might expect to take medication.
- **Every medicine has its benefits and its risks.** Deciding to take medication is all about balancing possible benefits against possible side effects.
- **Medications often help the most when they're part of an overall treatment program.** Your plan may include therapy and other services to help with problems that medication alone can't treat.
- **It can take time to feel better.** Some medications take a few weeks to work. You also may have to try more than one medication before you get the right fit, but many people find it's worth the wait.

Types of Medications

Antipsychotic medications can help reduce or, in some cases, eliminate hearing unwanted voices or having fearful thoughts. They can promote thinking clearly and staying focused on reality.

Antidepressants help reduce such feelings as sadness or depressed mood and anxiety as well as suicidal thoughts. They do not, however, make people "happy" or change their personalities.

Mood stabilizers help reduce or eliminate extremes of high and low moods and related symptoms. They shouldn't keep you from experiencing the normal ups and downs of life, though.

Tranquilizers and sleeping pills can reduce anxiety and insomnia and help you feel more relaxed. Usually, these medications are used only briefly because longer use can cause dependency.

Stimulants and related medicines can have a calming effect and help improve concentration and attention span. They also can improve a person's ability to follow directions and reduce hyperactivity.

Medication Decisions

- **Get information.** Ask your provider how the medication is supposed to help with your specific concerns and find out about any possible side effects.
- **Talk with others with similar experiences.** Self-help groups and peer specialists, people with mental health conditions who are trained to help can provide great first-hand information.
- **Think about your priorities and goals.** Is relief from symptoms extremely important? If not, maybe you're willing to live with some symptoms to avoid side effects. What are your main life goals? How might medication help?



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- **Sometimes the only way to know if a medication is right for you is to try it.** You may find that it helps you feel much better. If not, you can decide to stop later.

Getting the Most Out of Your Medication. Some people get relief from their symptoms immediately, others after a few days or weeks; for others it may take even longer. Medications differ widely in how quickly they take effect. After a short time on the medication, it's important to share with your doctor or therapist how you are doing with the treatment. Remember to be honest with your provider. Tell him or her about your symptoms. Also make sure to tell the provider about any drugs, alcohol, over-the-counter or prescription medicines and supplements you've been taking.

Dealing with side effects. If you're having trouble with a medication, or experiencing unpleasant side effects, don't suffer in silence. Your doctor or pharmacist will likely have suggestions that can help. Sometimes side effects can be addressed easily.

Staying Safe. Following some basic guidelines will protect your health while taking medication:

- Avoid using street drugs or drinking alcohol while taking psychiatric medications. The combination can be dangerous and even deadly.
- Be careful while driving or using machinery, especially if your medicine makes you sleepy.
- Women who may become pregnant, are pregnant, or are breast-feeding should talk with their doctor about possible special concerns related to medications.
- Stopping medications abruptly may cause you to feel ill - and possibly could even cause a seizure. They should be stopped gradually and according to your doctor's instructions.
- If taking a medicine causes you to feel sick, have a fever, skin reaction or anything else that worries you, contact your doctor or pharmacist as soon as possible.

Ask Important Questions. To protect your health, be sure to ask your doctor or pharmacist:

1. What is the name of the medication? Is it a "brand name" or generic?
2. When will the medication begin to work?
3. What is the recommended dosage? How many times a day will I take it?
4. Should I take the medication with food?
5. What are the side effects that commonly occur with this medication?
6. Is this medication addictive? Can it be abused?
7. Are there any laboratory tests that I need before beginning this medication or while I'm taking it?
8. Are there any medications, foods or supplements I should avoid while taking this medication?
9. How long will I be taking this medication? If I stop taking it, what are the chances of my symptoms returning?
10. Is there any chance my symptoms will be worse once I stop?
11. How soon will I see results?

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