

Antipsychotics

Q. Why should I read this?

A. You may want to read this if you or a member of your family is suffering from, for example, a psychiatric disorder such as schizophrenia or mania, or is taking an antipsychotic.

Q. Why am I being given this medication?

A. Doctors can prescribe antipsychotics for the treatment of psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia or mania (alternative: for the treatment of delusions, hallucinations, paranoia, or mania). Sometimes, they may also be prescribed together with antidepressants in people with severe depression.

Q. What about Counselling or Therapy?

A. In most cases, antipsychotic medication will be the best course of treatment for conditions such as schizophrenia or mania (for psychotic symptoms). Discuss this with your doctor, as either counselling or therapy may be sometimes be helpful in addition to medication.

Q. Do antipsychotics work?

A. Studies show that antipsychotics can be effective in the vast majority of those that take them. They must be taken daily or as instructed by your doctor in the Patient Information Leaflet because if you don't they will not work.

Q. Can antipsychotics change my personality or make me feel "zoned"?

A. Antipsychotics can help clear your thinking and improve your social interactions, your mood and your expression of mood. They also can improve delusions or paranoia. Sometimes, people can feel sedated, sleepy, or dizzy when they first take antipsychotics. It is important to discuss your concerns about the effects antipsychotics have on you with your doctor immediately, or if needed, attend your local Accident & Emergency Department.

Q. How long do they take to work?

A. Usually, antipsychotics start working within a few days. However, it sometimes can take up to 4-6 weeks for an acute psychotic or manic episode to resolve, even with optimal treatment.

Q. When can I stop?

A. The risk of suffering another episode of psychosis or mania after stopping antipsychotic medication is very high. Therefore, antipsychotics should only stop after discussion with your doctor. Your doctor will weigh up and discuss the risks and benefits of stopping antipsychotic medication with you.

Q. Why should I continue to take antipsychotics for so long if I feel well?

A. It is really important to continue taking the antipsychotic for the amount time suggested by your doctor so as to get the full benefit of the antipsychotic you are taking and also to try and prevent the psychosis from coming back.

Q. Sometimes I hear or read or see that antipsychotics can be 'bad' for you and I feel like stopping the antipsychotic. What should I do?

A. If you have any concerns about the antipsychotic that you are taking then go and speak to the doctor that gave you the medication or your pharmacist. They may be able to put your mind at rest by putting the risk of taking the antipsychotic and not taking it into context. It is important to speak to your doctor before stopping your medication.

Q. What side effects do they have?

A. Different antipsychotics have different side effects. For side effects about the medication you are taking please see the Patient Information Leaflet that came with your antipsychotic medication or if you are in patient in hospital then ask a member of staff for a copy of the Patient Information Leaflet. In general, antipsychotics are not addictive (physically) like smoking, for example. However, they can be psychologically addictive for example like tea or coffee. For side effects about the medication you are taking please see the Patient Information Leaflet that came with your antipsychotic medication or if you are in patient in hospital then ask a member of staff for a copy of the Patient Information Leaflet.

Q. What if I am pregnant or trying for a baby?

A. Please consult your doctor if you are or think you are pregnant or are nursing and on an antipsychotic.

Q. Can I get an antipsychotic if I am under 18 years of age?

A. In general, antipsychotics should only be prescribed to those under the age of 18 years by a qualified medical specialist.

Please keep out of the reach of children

Q. Can I drink alcohol when I am taking antipsychotics?

A. It is generally recommended to avoid alcohol when taking antipsychotics. Please consult the Patient Information Leaflet and if needs be discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist.

Q. What causes psychosis or mania?

A. Psychosis is thought to be caused by a variety of biological factors such as a chemical imbalance (of dopamine and other so called neurotransmitters) in the brain. Sometimes, the use of drugs, medication, or alcohol can trigger a psychotic or manic episode.

Q. How do antipsychotics work?

A. A popular theory is that antipsychotics may work by restoring the balance of various chemicals within the brain.

Q. What types of antipsychotics exist?

A. Phenothiazines (chlorpromazine), butyrophenones (haloperidol), thioxanthenes (flupentixol), and the so called 'atypical' antipsychotics (olanzapine, risperidone, amisulpiride, aripiprazole, quetiapine, clozapine) are the most commonly prescribed antipsychotics.

Q. Where can I get more information about antipsychotics & psychosis or mania?

A. Your doctor, pharmacist or the following websites:

www.imb.ie

www.medicines.ie

www.yourmentalhealth.ie

www.shineonline.ie

www.aware.ie

www.grow.ie

In addition, the Patient Information Leaflet that comes with your medication contains important and useful information about the medications you may be taking.