

What are antipsychotic medications?

These are medications that have calming effects that benefit some people with mental health illnesses or severe behavioural problems.

The way antipsychotic medications work is not fully understood. Some may work by reducing the activity of a chemical called dopamine in some parts of the brain.

All antipsychotic medications do not work in the same way. If one does not work or causes side effects, your/your child's doctor can try a different one.

These medications are only available with a doctor's prescription.

What are these medications used for?

Schizophrenia and other Psychotic Illnesses

These medications help to decrease or prevent the return of:

- ◆ hallucinations (hearing and seeing things that are not really there)
- ◆ delusions (believing in ideas that are not real)
- ◆ disorganised thinking (thoughts darting from one idea to the next with no order to them)
- ◆ changed emotions (getting excited or angry for no reason or having no feelings at all)
- ◆ lack of motivation (not wanting to do anything)

- ◆ some cognitive problems (such as difficulties with attention and concentration)

Bipolar disorder

Some of these medications help to decrease or prevent the return of:

- ◆ mania (abnormal thoughts of self importance, loss of self control, fast and often senseless talking, danger-seeking activities, the need for only small amounts of sleep)
- ◆ depression (feelings of hopelessness and sadness, thoughts of wanting to self-harm or to die)

Severe behavioural problems

Some of these medications help children with conduct disorder, autism and intellectual disability to decrease:

- ◆ aggression and hostility
- ◆ self-harm
- ◆ tantrums
- ◆ hyperactivity
- ◆ impulsivity
- ◆ repetitive behaviour

Tourette's disorder

Some of these medications help improve:

- ◆ severe tics (movements and noises that the person cannot control)

Medical specialists such as child psychiatrists and developmental paediatricians should supervise the prescribing of antipsychotics for children and adolescents.

How to take these medications

- ◆ Take these medications only as directed by your/your child's doctor, and do not give them to other people.
- ◆ The dose will vary with the condition being treated. Never change your dose unless your doctor tells you.
- ◆ Take these medications at the correct times to give them the best chance of working and to minimise side effects.
- ◆ These medications will usually be started at a low dose to allow the body time to get use to the medication and prevent some side effects. Some symptoms may improve within a few weeks but others may take months.

Antipsychotic medications should not be stopped suddenly unless directed by a doctor. If you or your child stops taking the medication suddenly the symptoms of the illness may return. Also, withdrawal reactions may occur such as nausea, vomiting, restlessness and mild flu-like symptoms. If the medication is to be stopped, the doctor will usually advise to slowly reduce the dose over many weeks or months. **ALWAYS DISCUSS FIRST WITH YOUR/YOUR CHILD'S DOCTOR IF YOU WISH TO CEASE YOUR/YOUR CHILD'S ANTIPSYCHOTIC MEDICATION.**

What to do if a dose is missed

- ◆ If you miss a dose of medication, take it as soon as you remember. However if the time you remember is closer to the time of the next dose than to the time of the dose missed, skip the missed dose and take the next dose at the usual time.

- ◆ Do not double-up on any doses by taking two doses at once to make up for missed doses.

Storing the medication

- ◆ Keep antipsychotic medications locked away out of the sight and reach of children. Some of these medications are extremely dangerous if taken in large quantities.
- ◆ Do not keep the medications in the bathroom, near the kitchen sink or in other damp, warm places because this may make them less effective.
- ◆ Keep the medications out of direct sunlight and other sources of heat.

Use of other medication

Check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any other medication, including those you buy without a prescription in a pharmacy, supermarket or health food shop. Other medications may be affected by antipsychotic medication or may affect how antipsychotic medications work. These include medications used to treat:

- ◆ arrhythmia (irregular heart beat)
 - ◆ Parkinson's disease
 - ◆ depression
 - ◆ epilepsy
 - ◆ high blood pressure
 - ◆ stomach cramps and travel sickness
 - ◆ infections of all types
- and also
- ◆ other antipsychotic medications
 - ◆ alcohol or medications that make you drowsy or slow your reactions, such as

sleeping tablets, tranquillisers or strong painkillers.

Smoking and illicit drugs such as marijuana, ecstasy, amphetamines (speed) and cocaine can also affect how antipsychotics work or reduce their effectiveness.

Possible side effects

Increased appetite and weight gain occurs often. Excessive weight gain needs to be prevented because of long term health risks such as diabetes and heart disease.

It is recommended to have:

- ◆ regular exercise
- ◆ a healthy low fat diet
- ◆ regular health checks

If weight gain becomes a problem the medication may need to be changed.

The **most common side effects that occur in the first week or so** include:

- ◆ sleepiness
- ◆ feeling dizzy (*standing up slowly may help*)
- ◆ fast heart rate

These problems will often go away with continued use, but if they are severe or persist, then contact the doctor.

Tell your/your child's doctor if any **other side effects** occur such as:

- ◆ stiff muscles
- ◆ shaking or muscle tremors
- ◆ feeling agitated or restless (trouble sitting still)
- ◆ abnormal movements of the tongue, mouth, hands and other muscles. (*If the tongue or throat is involved and causes*

breathing problems, go to your doctor or go to the emergency department of a hospital straight away.)

- ◆ decreased sexual desire and function
- ◆ breast enlargement or milk coming out of breasts in either males or females
- ◆ menstrual problems

Rare but more serious side effects that need to be seen by a doctor straight away include:

- ◆ neuroleptic malignant syndrome (NMS) where symptoms may include a high fever, stiff muscles, fast breathing, abnormal sweating and decreased alertness
- ◆ prolonged or severe fever which may be a sign that white blood cell numbers have fallen (*more likely with clozapine where frequent blood tests are required to check for this*)

If you and/or your child are worried about any effect you think may be caused by the medication, contact the doctor.

Names of commercially available antipsychotics

Older antipsychotics:

- ◆ Chlorpromazine, Flupenthixol, Fluphenazine, Haloperidol, Pericyazine, Pimozide, Thioridazine, Thiothixene, Trifluoperazine, Zuclopenthixol

Newer antipsychotics:

- ◆ Amisulpride, Aripiprazole, Clozapine, Olanzapine, Paliperidone, Quetiapine, Risperidone, Ziprasidone

About Your Medication

The use of antipsychotic medications in children and adolescents

(Phy042)

In case of overdose or poisoning, contact the Poisons Information Centre on 131126.

For further information please contact:

Your doctor or your child's doctor

Your pharmacist

Pharmacy Drug Information
(08) 8161 7222
Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm

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