

What are antipsychotic medications used for?

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

Schizophrenia and other psychotic illnesses

These medications help to decrease or prevent the return of symptoms such as:

- > hearing and seeing things that are not real
- > believing in ideas that are not real
- > thoughts darting from one idea to the next
- > getting excited or angry for no reason.

Bipolar disorder

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

- > mania
- > depression.

Severe behavioural problems

Some of these medications help decrease:

- > aggression, self-harm, tantrums, hyperactivity, impulsivity and repetitive behaviour.

Tourette's disorder

Some of these medications help improve:

- > severe movements and noises that the person cannot control.

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

How to take these medications

It is important that these medications are taken only as directed and are not given to others. Never change your dose unless your doctor tells you.

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.

If the medication is to be stopped, the doctor will usually advise to slowly reduce the dose over many weeks or months to prevent:

- > withdrawal reactions such as nausea, vomiting, restlessness and flu-like symptoms
- > symptoms of the illness returning.

Always discuss first with the doctor if you wish to cease antipsychotic medication.

What to do if a dose is missed

If you miss a dose of medication it can be taken as soon as you remember.

- > Do not take the missed dose if it is close to the next dose.
- > Do not double-up on any 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 medications

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.

Medications that may cause problems with antipsychotics include those to treat:

- > arrhythmia (irregular heart beat)
- > Parkinson's disease
- > depression
- > epilepsy
- > high blood pressure
- > stomach cramps and travel sickness
- > infections of all types.

Alcohol, sleeping tablets, tranquillisers or strong painkillers can make you very drowsy or slow your reaction time.

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 frequently. This increases the risk of developing problems such as diabetes and heart disease.

It is recommended to have:

- > regular exercise
- > a healthy low fat diet
- > regular health checks.

Possible side effects (continued)

The most common side effects to occur in the first week or so are:

- > sleepiness
- > feeling dizzy (standing up slowly may help)
- > fast heart rate.

Often these problems will disappear with continued use but if they are severe or persist contact the doctor.

Tell your doctor if these side effects occur:

- > stiff muscles
- > shaking or muscle tremors
- > feeling agitated or 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 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 serious side effects that need to be seen by a doctor straight away include:

- > neuroleptic malignant syndrome (NMS) where symptoms include 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.

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

General Information

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

The information in this brochure has been put together by the Children, Youth and Women's Health Service to help you understand more about this type of medicine and its effects. This information is general only; it has not been tailored to your specific condition or needs, and does not contain all the information that is available about this medicine. The information is accurate and up to date at the time it was written, but you are responsible for seeking more detailed information, available from your doctor, pharmacist and the product manufacturer, about this medicine and how you should use it.

For more information

**Women's and Children's Hospital
Pharmacy Drug Information**

72 King William Road

North Adelaide SA 5006

Telephone: (08) 8161 7222

Monday to Friday

9.00am to 5.00pm

www.wch.sa.gov.au

Non-English speaking: for information in languages other than English, call the interpreting and Translating Centre and ask them to call Department of Health. This service is available at no cost to you, contact (08) 8226 1990.

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Women's & Children's Hospital

Antipsychotic Medications for Children and Adolescents

About your child's medication

