

Antipsychotics

Antipsychotics are drugs, which are used to treat psychosis/schizophrenia. Some are also licensed to be used as mood stabilisers. They act on brain chemicals involved with perception, thinking and emotions and correct their imbalance. Medicines do not cure the illness but treat the symptoms and prevent relapses in a large number of people.

Dosage and side effects

Individuals respond differently to medication so finding the right dose might take a little time. Patients are started on the lowest possible dose to avoid side effects. Side effects occur because these medicines not only act on the parts of brain where we want them to act but also effect some other parts of the brain. Fortunately the newer drugs have mostly mild side effects, which usually disappear after being on the treatment for some time.

Common side effects include drowsiness, weight gain, altered bowel movements, low blood pressure and increase in salivation. Weight gain generally occurs in the first 6-12 months of the treatment. If this is something that concerns you, it can be arranged for a dietician to see you and give you advice about diet. Since these tablets cause sedation it is advisable not to drive in the initial part of the treatment.

Available in different forms

Antipsychotics are available in tablet and injection forms. Patients at times do not take their tablets regularly. Because of their disorganized thinking they might find it hard to remember to take it or they may feel that they do not need to be on medicines. In such cases injectable form of antipsychotics called depots can be tried. They come in slow release form and can be given every 2-4 weeks.

Antipsychotics should not be stopped suddenly. If you are worried about any of the side effects, discuss it with your doctor and a different drug can be tried as different drugs have different side effect profile.

Aids to facilitate compliance

Medication calendar, pillboxes and pairing medicines with routine activities like meals.

Duration of treatment

After the first episode it is advisable to continue with the medication for 1-2 years. Patients are regularly reviewed and if there are no concerns then initially the dose is decreased. The decision to come off medicines, if the mental state remains stable, is made jointly with the patient.

If there have been more than one episodes of psychosis/schizophrenia, it is advisable to continue with the lowest effective dose.