



Medication Management

How Different Types of Medications Affect Your Health

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, it may help to know 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.

Medications often help the most when they're part of an overall treatment program. Your plan may include psychotherapy, peer programs and rehabilitative services to help with problems that medication alone can't treat.

Every medicine has its benefits and its risks. Deciding to take medication is all about balancing possible benefits against possible side effects. Sometimes, it's hard to know how a medicine will affect you until you try it.

It can take time to feel better. Some medications take a few weeks to work. And sometimes a medication's side effects may start before its benefits. 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.

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 herbal supplements you've been taking. That way you'll get the most appropriate treatment.

Types of Medications

Learning about your medication options can help you have a more meaningful conversation with your doctor. You also can be more fully involved in taking care of your health. Medications for mental health conditions fall into the following types:

Antipsychotic medications can help reduce or, in some cases, eliminate hearing unwanted voices or having very fearful thoughts. They can promote thinking clearly, staying focused on reality, and feeling organized and calm. They also can help you sleep better and communicate more effectively.

Possible side effects include: drowsiness, upset stomach, increased appetite and weight gain, blurred vision, constipation, dry mouth, dizziness, low blood pressure, restlessness, weakness, shakes and twitches, and muscle stiffness. Rare side effects include seizures and problems controlling internal body temperature.

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. These medications are also used to treat depression that lasts for a long time, that goes away but comes back or that isn't treated well enough with an antidepressant alone.

Possible side effects include:

- stomach problems
- drowsiness
- weight gain
- dizziness
- shaking
- blurred vision
- lack of coordination or confusion

Tranquilizers and sleeping pills can reduce anxiety and insomnia and help you feel more relaxed. Although some of them are used mostly to help with sleep, they all might cause drowsiness. Usually, these medications are used only briefly because longer use can cause dependency.

These medicines are generally safe when used as prescribed and have relatively few serious side effects. As with any medicine, though, some people may have difficulties. You should call your doctor right away if you experience headaches, slurred speech, confusion, dizziness, nausea or increased nervousness or excitability.

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

Possible side effects include:

- trouble falling asleep
- decreased appetite
- weight loss

Less common side effects can include:

- headaches
- stomachaches
- irritability
- rapid pulse
- increased blood pressure

These often go away within a few weeks after ending use or if your health care provider lowers your dose.