



Medication Management

Medication Decisions That Affect Your Health

When you're feeling overwhelmed or confused, it's understandable that you might want to let others make medication decisions for you. But it's becoming clearer to researchers, providers and mental health consumers themselves that being actively involved in your treatment can make a real difference in your recovery.

Talking honestly with your doctor is a big part of that process. If you discuss your concerns and learn about your options, you are much more likely to come up with a plan that works well for you and for the life you want to create.

The following tips can help you decide about taking a medication:

Get information. Ask your provider how the medication is supposed to help with your specific concerns. Also find out about any possible side effects. You might consider taking notes, since it can be hard to remember a lot of information, especially when you aren't feeling well. You also might ask a friend or relative to go with you for emotional support and to help keep track of important information.

Talk with others with similar experiences. Self-help groups and peer specialists people with mental health conditions who are trained to help-can provide great first-hand information. Local Mental Health America affiliate offices, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance and Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder are good sources for this kind of support. Remember that every person is different, but you can learn from the experiences of others.

Think about your priorities and goals. Is relief from symptoms extremely important? If not, maybe you're willing to live with some symptoms to avoid side effects. What are your main life goals? How might medication help?

Sometimes the only way to know if a medication is right for you is to try it. You may find that it helps you feel much better. If not, you can decide to stop later.

Stop Taking Your Medication

There are many reasons people consider stop taking their medication. Some people dislike the side effects, feel that there's stigma about medication or worry about the expense.

If taking a medication causes you to feel sick, have a fever, skin reaction or anything else that worries you, contact your doctor. Medications should be stopped gradually and according to your doctor's instructions.

To quit taking your medication is a big decision and can seriously affect your health, so think it through carefully. Some possible steps if you're thinking about stopping include:

Take a look at your situation. Consider whether changes in your life or your body may be affecting how well the medication is working. Ask your doctor if switching or adding medications might help. And ask whether stopping a medication creates a risk that means it won't work as well if you decide you want to go back on it later.

Talk honestly with your health care provider. Some people feel uncomfortable raising concerns with their providers. Remember that it's your right to ask questions and make decisions. To help the conversation go smoothly, make sure you both have enough time to talk. State your concerns calmly, and try to agree on some reasonable next steps for promoting your recovery.

Talk to the people who support you. They may be able to help you decide. Even if you don't want help with the decision, people close to you should know that you haven't been feeling well. That way they can provide extra support if you need it.

Staying Safe: Ask Important Questions

To protect your health, be sure to ask your doctor or pharmacist the following questions:

1. What is the name of the medication? Is it known by other names too? Is it a "brand name" or generic?
2. When will the medication begin to work?
3. What is the recommended dosage? How many times a day will I take it?
4. Should I take the medication with food?
5. What are the side effects that commonly occur with this medication?
6. What are the less common but more serious side effects that can occur?
7. Is this medication addictive? Can it be abused?
8. Are there any laboratory tests that I need before beginning this medication or while I'm taking it?
9. Are there any medications, foods or supplements I should avoid while taking this medication?
10. How long will I be taking this medication? If I stop taking it, what are the chances of my symptoms returning?
11. Is there any chance my symptoms will be worse once I stop?
12. How soon will I see results?

