

Fact sheet

Antipsychotic Medicines for Children and Adolescents

What are antipsychotic medicines used for?

These medicines have calming effects that help some people with mental health illnesses or severe **problems** with behaviour.

Schizophrenia and other psychotic illnesses

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

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

Bipolar disorder

Some antipsychotics help to decrease or prevent the return of:

- > mania
- > depression.

Severe behavioural problems

Some antipsychotics help decrease:

- > aggression, harming yourself, tantrums, hyperactivity, being impulsive and repetitive behaviour.

Tourette's disorder

Some antipsychotics help improve:

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

Prescribing antipsychotics should be supervised by specialist doctors such as child psychiatrists and developmental paediatricians.

How do I take antipsychotic medicines?

Take antipsychotics only as directed and do not give them to others. Never change your dose unless your doctor tells you.

You will usually start taking a low dose to allow your body to get used to them and prevent some side effects. Some symptoms may improve within a few weeks but others may take months.

If you need to stop antipsychotics, your 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.

If you wish to stop taking antipsychotics, always talk with your doctor first.

What to do if a dose is missed

- > Do not double-up on any doses.
- > If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember.
- > If it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and take your next dose at the usual time.

Possible side effects

Increased appetite and weight gain are very common. This increases the risk of developing health problems such as diabetes and heart disease. If you are going to take antipsychotics for longer than a month, your doctor should regularly check and record aspects of your physical health. They will use this information to help stop problems happening.

We recommend you have:

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



Possible side effects (continued)

The most common side effects during the first week or so are:

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

Often these will go away when you keep taking it but if they are severe or don't go away, talk with your doctor.

Tell your doctor if you get these side effects:

- > stiff muscles
- > shaking or muscle tremors
- > feeling agitated or have trouble sitting still
- > abnormal movements of the tongue, mouth, hands and other muscles (If the tongue or throat is involved and you have problems breathing, go straight to hospital.)
- > decreased sexual desire and function
- > breasts get bigger or milk comes out of them - either males or females
- > menstrual (period) problems.

Rare but serious side effects which you will need to see your doctor about straight away:

- > neuroleptic malignant syndrome (NMS) with symptoms including high fever, stiff muscles, fast breathing, abnormal sweating and decreased alertness
- > prolonged or severe fever, which may be a sign that your white blood cell numbers have fallen and you may have trouble fighting infection.

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

Use of other medicines

Check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any other medicines, including those you buy without a prescription in a pharmacy, supermarket or health food shop.

Medicines 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 pain relief medicines can make you very sleepy or slow your reaction time.

Smoking and illicit drugs such as marijuana, ecstasy, amphetamines (speed, ice) and cocaine can also affect how antipsychotic medicines work or make them less effective.

Storing the medicine

- > Keep them locked away out of the sight and reach of children.
- > Do not keep them in the bathroom, near the kitchen sink or in other damp, warm places because they may not work very well.
- > Keep them out of direct sunlight and heat.

Important information

Keep medicines out of reach of children. In case of overdose or poisoning, contact:

The Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 (24 hour service).

For more information

SA Pharmacy Medicines Information Service
Women's and Children's Hospital
Phone: (08) 8161 7555 (9am – 5pm Weekdays)
Email: medinfo@sa.gov.au



By using this information, you acknowledge that the Department of Health, the Minister for Health, or any employees of the Department of Health do not accept liability however arising, for any consequences of anything done or not done by a person in relation to the usage of and/or reliance (whether in whole or in part) the information provided herein.

© Department for Health and Ageing, Government of South Australia. All rights reserved.
Updated July 2020