

Understanding Antipsychotic Medicine: Giving Support



Psychosis is a serious mental disorder. People with this condition have lost contact with reality. This means they may see, smell, hear, or believe things that aren't there or aren't true.

Psychosis can be caused by physical illness, another mental disorder, or by alcohol and drug use. Antipsychotic medicines may help ease the symptoms of psychosis. This sheet will tell you more about these medicines and how you can support your loved one.

Types of antipsychotic medicines

These are some common antipsychotic medicines:

- Chlorpromazine
- Quetiapine
- Aripiprazole
- Ziprasidone
- Loxapine
- Haloperidol
- Clozapine
- Risperidone
- Olanzapine

What are the risks of medicines?

Antipsychotic medicines may cause many side effects. Some side effects, such as a dry mouth and blurred vision, are minor. These often go away in a few weeks. Other side effects are more severe. They include:

- **Tardive dyskinesia.** This causes muscles in the face to make movements a person can't control. Unless it's found early, the condition may not go away.
- **Akathisia.** This causes people to be very restless. They may not be able to sit still. Often, this symptom can be helped with other medicines.
- **Parkinsonism.** This may cause slowed movements, a shuffling walk, and drooling. Other medicines may help manage these symptoms.
- **Neuroleptic malignant syndrome.** This occurs only in rare cases. But it can lead to death. Signs include rigid limbs, high fever, and a fast heartbeat. The person may be very confused. They may have trouble breathing. If you see these signs, get emergency help right away.
- **Other conditions.** Antipsychotic medicines can also cause high cholesterol. They can raise the risk for diabetes and heart issues. It is important to have regular follow-up care with a healthcare provider to watch for these conditions.

Can side effects be prevented?

In most cases, side effects can't be prevented before they happen. But they can be treated. You can help your loved one by knowing what to look for. If you notice side effects, talk with your loved one. Ask them to call their healthcare provider. Or ask for their permission to call. Never change the dose or stop a medicine unless directed to do so by the healthcare provider. Never give the person someone else's medicine. The provider may change the dose or type of medicine or add other medicines to help relieve side effects.

Helping your loved one

Antipsychotic medicines may return your loved one to a more normal life. The side effects can be very troubling. But you can help in many ways. You can show your love and support. You can be their advocate. And you can help support them in their medicine management.

Encourage them to:

- Talk with their provider about side effects and how they can be managed
- Keep taking their medicine as prescribed. Stopping medicine will cause the symptoms of psychosis to come back. These are often far worse than the side effects.
- Talk with providers when they have concerns
- Keep all of their appointments
- Get important screening tests done for conditions medicines might cause, such as diabetes and heart disease

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