



Medications used to treat psychosis are usually from the medication group, antipsychotics. They work by changing the chemicals in the brain that are causing the psychotic symptoms. Antipsychotics are usually taken daily as a liquid, tablet, wafer or long lasting injection (called depot). When someone has psychosis he/she may be treated with other drugs, as well as antipsychotics, depending on the symptoms the person has. There are many different antipsychotics and the one prescribed depends on various factors such as symptoms, other medications taken and side effects. They are usually classed into two different groups, atypical and typical. The atypical antipsychotics are more commonly used and some examples are listed below.

Atypical (newer) antipsychotics

- > olanzapine (Zyprexa)
- > amisulpride (Solian)
- > quetiapine (Seroquel)
- > risperidone (Risperdal)
- > aripiprazole (Abilify)
- > clozapine (Clozaril)

Side effects of antipsychotics

Different people vary widely in their response to medications and in their susceptibility to side effects. Therefore, a person may or may not experience some of the side effects listed below. The doctor will aim to balance the benefits of antipsychotics and undesired effects of medication, and may prescribe other medication to reduce a side effect. Side effects of antipsychotics can be:

Common:

Drowsiness, weight gain, dry mouth, constipation, dizziness, difficulty urinating, blurred vision, changes in eating patterns, agitation, excessive saliva.

Uncommon:

Stiffness or trembling in muscles, loss of menstrual periods, effects on sexual functioning, unusual movements.

It is important to inform the prescribing doctor straight away about side effects. Weight gain is a fairly frequent side effect. If weight gain is a problem, diet and exercise may be helpful or the doctor may change the medication. The doctor or health professional can assist in advice about other strategies regarding weight control.

How long do antipsychotics take to work?

Antipsychotics can take awhile before they begin working, which is normal but frustrating. It can take several weeks before there is any noticeable effect, although a beneficial effect within 1-2 weeks on sleep and agitation is common.

Antipsychotics should be taken as directed by the prescribing doctor (this will also be written on the medication packet). It is recommended they are taken at regular times of the day. Taking them at meal times may make it easier to remember.

What to avoid/Precautions.

People taking antipsychotic medication should avoid the use of illegal or street drugs as they may cause a return of psychotic symptoms. Combining alcohol and medication can cause unpredictable effects; therefore it is best to keep alcohol to a minimum.

It is important to inform the prescribing doctor straight away about side effects.

How long are they taken for?

This should be discussed with the prescribing doctor. Medication helps people with psychosis by reducing the number and intensity of symptoms, as well as decreasing the likelihood of having a relapse. Consequently antipsychotics may be required to stay well – not because they are addictive. Generally, a person who is experiencing a first episode psychosis will have the recommendation of staying on antipsychotics for 12 months. When a person has experienced more than one episode it is usually recommended they stay on medication for longer periods.

This information is to be used in conjunction with the information your doctor/health professional provides. It is not to be used in place of your health professional's advice. If you have concerns or are worried about side effects or dosage please contact your health professional.