

Anticholinergics (an-tea-coal-in-er-jiks)

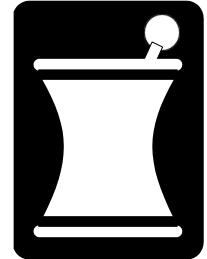
Patient Information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

Why have I been prescribed an anticholinergic?

Certain types of medicines (anti-psychotics) used to treat schizophrenia, psychosis and similar conditions, may cause you to have a tremor or “the shakes”. They can also make you feel stiff or rigid or restless. This range of side effects are known as extra-pyramidal side effects.

Anticholinergics are used to help to treat some of these side effects.

Anticholinergics are also used to treat symptoms of conditions such as Parkinson’s disease and other movement disorders. They can also be useful in treating hypersalivation caused by clozapine.



What are anticholinergics?

“Anticholinergics” is the name of a group of medicines prescribed to relieve these side effects. Examples of anticholinergics are benztropine, procyclidine, atropine, hyoscine, and orphenadrine.

Are anticholinergics safe to take?

It is usually safe to take anticholinergics as prescribed by your doctor, but they don’t suit everyone. Let your doctor know if any of the following apply to you as extra care may be needed:

- If you have glaucoma, or suffer from liver, heart, stomach, kidney or prostate trouble.
- If you are pregnant, breastfeeding or wish to become pregnant.
- A condition called tardive dyskinesia

How should I take my anticholinergic medicine?

Look at the label on your medicine; it should have all the necessary instructions on it. Follow this advice carefully. If you have any questions, speak to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

What should I do if I miss a dose?

Never change your dose without checking with your doctor. If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember, as long as it is within a few hours of the usual time.

Sometimes anticholinergics may be taken when you think you need them, rather than regularly. Discuss with your doctor the best way for you to take these tablets.

What will happen to me when I start taking an anticholinergic?

The stiffness or shaking that you are experiencing will usually become less severe within one or two hours of taking the first dose. The full effect may take a little longer to come about.

You might get some side effects from your anti-cholinergic. Most of these are quite mild and should go away after a week or so. The table below tells you what to do if you do get some of these. There are many other possible side effects.

Ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect.

Are there other medicines I should take care with?

If anticholinergics are combined with some other medicines such as antihistamines or cough and cold preparations, you may get a doubling up of some side effects. Let your doctor you are taking an anticholinergic when you visit them. If you wish to purchase an “over the counter” medicine, check with the pharmacist that it will not interfere with anticholinergic medicines.

When can I stop this medication?

Some people find that after a few months, they can come off their anticholinergic and the original side effects of the other medication do not come back. You and your doctor should decide together when you should stop this medication.

Anticholinergics are not thought to be addictive but some people find they start to enjoy some of their effects. This means they might have some difficulty stopping them.

Always check with your pharmacist before buying any medicines over-the-counter.

Side effects	What is it?	What should I do if this happens to me?
COMMON		
Anxiety	Feeling nervous	This should go with time. If you are worried, contact your doctor.
Blurred vision	Things look fuzzy and you can't focus properly.	Don't drive or operate machinery if this occurs. See your doctor if you are worried. You won't need glasses.
Constipation	Feeling “bunged up” inside. You can't pass a bowel motion.	Eat more fibre, e.g. bran, fruit and vegetables. Do more walking. Make sure you drink plenty of fluid. A mild laxative from a pharmacy might help.

Dry mouth	Your mouth will feel dry and you will not produce much saliva (spit). Dry mouth can cause problems with speech, taste, chewing and swallowing. It can also the increase the risk of getting dental decay and infection in your mouth.	To help prevent dental problems sip water regularly to moisten your mouth. Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Avoid sugary drinks and snacks between meals. Try sugar free chewing gum to stimulate saliva or discuss using an oral lubricant with your pharmacist or dentist.
Stomach upset	This includes feeling and being sick and getting diarrhoea.	If it's mild, see your pharmacist. If it lasts for more than a day or so, stop taking your anticholinergic and see your doctor.
Sweating less	You don't sweat as much and will find that your body temperature can increase	Be careful to avoid becoming overheated during exercise or hot weather. Drink cold fluids. Avoid taking hot baths, using hot tubs and saunas
RARE		
Confusion	Your mind is all mixed up.	Contact your doctor soon.
Urine retention	Difficulty in passing urine, pain when urinating or not much urine passed. This is more likely to occur in older men.	Contact your doctor now.

Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some of the effects of medication. You may also find other books or leaflets useful. If you have access to the internet, you may find a lot of information there as well. Be careful as internet-based information is not always accurate.