

Aripiprazole

Patient Information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

Why have I been prescribed Aripiprazole?

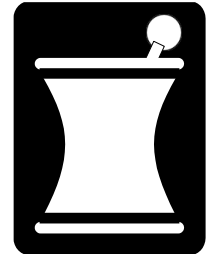
Aripiprazole is an antipsychotic and is used to treat schizophrenia, psychosis and similar conditions.

People who have schizophrenia may hear voices talking to them or about them. They may also become suspicious or paranoid. Some people also have problems with their thinking and feel that other people can read their thoughts. These are called “positive symptoms”. Aripiprazole can help to relieve these symptoms.

Many people with schizophrenia also experience “negative symptoms”. They may feel tired and lacking in energy and may become quite inactive and withdrawn. Aripiprazole may help relieve these symptoms as well.

Aripiprazole is also used to treat bipolar affective disorder, depression, irritability associated with autistic disorders, Tourette’s syndrome and to reduce a hormone called prolactin which can be increased by some other antipsychotics.

Aripiprazole may also be prescribed for people who have had side effects such as unusual body movements and shaking with older types of antipsychotics.



What exactly is Aripiprazole?

Aripiprazole is one of a group of medicines used to treat schizophrenia and similar disorders. These illnesses are sometimes referred to as psychoses, hence the name antipsychotics given to this group of medicines. Aripiprazole is a newer type of antipsychotic and acts slightly differently to the other antipsychotics. It may help people who have negative symptoms and have not got much better on the older antipsychotics.

Is Aripiprazole safe to take?

It is usually safe to take Aripiprazole regularly as prescribed by your doctor, but it doesn’t suit everyone.

Let your doctor know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care maybe needed:

- If you have Parkinson’s disease, or suffer from liver or kidney trouble.
- If you are pregnant, breastfeeding or wish to become pregnant.
- If you are elderly or have suffered a stroke.
- If you have any heart problems, e.g. an irregular heart rhythm, heart failure or a recent heart attack.

How should I take Aripiprazole and what should I do if I miss a dose?

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. Never change your dose without consulting with your doctor. If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember if it is within the same day.

What will happen to me when I start taking Aripiprazole?

Antipsychotics do not work straight away. It may take several days or even weeks for some of the symptoms to reduce. To begin with, you may find that this medicine will help you feel more relaxed and calmer. Later, after one or two weeks, other symptoms should begin to improve.

Some people may get side effects before they start to feel any better. Most side effects should go away after a few weeks. Look at the table over the page. It tells you what to do if you get any of the usual side effects. Not everyone will get the side effects shown. 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 avoid or take care with?

Always check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist before starting a new medicine or purchasing medicines over the counter. Aripiprazole when combined with some other medicines can cause unpleasant side effects.

When I feel better, can I stop taking Aripiprazole?

No. If you stop taking aripiprazole, your original symptoms may return, but this may not be for three to six months after you stop the medication. You and your doctor or prescriber should decide together when you can come off it. Most people need to be on aripiprazole for quite a long time, sometimes years. This is not thought to be harmful. Aripiprazole is not addictive.

What about alcohol and marijuana?

It is recommended that when you are taking aripiprazole, you do not drink alcohol, use marijuana, synthetic cannabis or take party pills (“herbal highs”). These, taken with aripiprazole, can make some people drowsy. They can lessen the effect of aripiprazole and add to side effects such as feeling clumsy. This can lead to falls or accidents. As well as this, drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana, synthetic cannabis or taking party pills often makes psychosis worse or mood unstable. Excessive use of any or all of these is especially likely to do this.

Once you are used to your aripiprazole you can sometimes drink alcohol in small amounts without any harm. If you want a drink, try a glass of your normal drink and see how you feel. If it doesn't make you feel drowsy and clumsy, it is probably okay to drink small amounts. It pays to be cautious because alcohol affects people in different ways, especially when they are taking medicine.

It is recognised that many road accidents occur because of mixing alcohol and marijuana with these medicines. Don't stop taking aripiprazole just because you fancy a joint or a drink at the weekend.

What is the metabolic syndrome?

Antipsychotics can occasionally cause something called the metabolic syndrome. This is a combination of weight gain, raised cholesterol and raised blood sugars. Some antipsychotics are more likely to cause the metabolic syndrome than others. Aripiprazole is one of the antipsychotics that is less likely to cause the metabolic syndrome.

When you start an antipsychotic, your weight, height and waist size will be measured. A heart test called an ECG and a number of blood tests will be completed. These will be repeated several times during the first year that you are on an antipsychotic to ensure that you remain healthy. It is important when you start an antipsychotic that you eat a healthy diet and that you do some regular exercise. Talk to your case manager or doctor for advice about this. They may also offer to refer you to a dietitian.

Side effect	What is it?	What should I do if this happens to me?
COMMON		
Insomnia	Not being able to get to sleep or stay asleep at night.	Discuss this with your prescriber who may be able to change your dose time. Aripiprazole is often taken in the morning.
Headache	When your head is painful and pounding.	You can take paracetamol for this.
Agitation or anxiety	Being more on edge.	Discuss ways to help you relax with your doctor.
Nausea and Diarrhoea	Feeling sick or being sick and loose bowel motions.	This should wear off within 1 – 2 weeks. Taking each dose with food may help. If it is bad, contact your doctor.
FAIRLY COMMON		
Drowsiness	Feeling sleepy or sluggish.	Avoid tasks you need to be alert for such as driving or using machines. Discuss with your doctor. Ask your doctor if you can take your aripiprazole at a different time of day.
Constipation	Feeling “bunged up” inside. Unable to pass a bowel motion.	Eat more fibre, e.g. bran and vegetables. Do more walking. Make sure that you drink plenty of fluid. A mild laxative from a pharmacy might help.

UNCOMMON		
Movement disorders	Feeling shaky or having a tremor. Your neck may twist back. Your eyes and tongue may move on their own.	It is not usually dangerous but tell your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. It may be possible to have a medication prescribed to help these symptoms.
Akathisia	You feel restless, unable to feel comfortable unless you are moving.	Tell your case manager or prescriber about this. It may be possible to change your medicine or dose or give you something to reduce these feelings.
Postural hypotension	A low blood pressure. You may feel faint when you stand up.	Try not to stand up too quickly. If you feel dizzy, don't drive. This dizziness is not dangerous.
Blurred Vision	Things look fuzzy and you can't focus properly.	See your doctor if you are worried. You won't need glasses.
RARE		
Allergic reactions	A sudden onset of skin rash, itching, swelling of face, lips and tongue, difficulty breathing.	Contact your doctor or the Emergency Department immediately.
NMS	Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome includes a high body temperature, muscle stiffness and being unable to move.	It usually occurs within a few weeks of a dose change. Contact your doctor immediately. Keep cool with fans or cool water.
Seizures	Having fits or seizures or a blackout.	Stop taking your aripiprazole and contact your doctor now.

Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some 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.

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