

Typical Antipsychotics (an-tea-sigh-cot-ticks)

Patient Information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

Why have I been prescribed an antipsychotic?

Antipsychotics are medicines used to help treat schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and psychosis.

When people have schizophrenia, they 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. Some people may feel tired, lacking in energy and may become quite inactive and withdrawn. These are called “negative symptoms”.

Antipsychotics are also useful to help manage agitation, anxiety, mania or hypomania, nausea, sleep problems and many other conditions.



What exactly are antipsychotics?

Schizophrenia and similar disorders are sometimes referred to as psychoses, so this group of medicines are called antipsychotics.

Some examples of typical antipsychotics include chlorpromazine (Largactil), haloperidol (Serenace, Haldol) and methotrimeprazine (Nozinan).

These older ones are sometimes referred to as typical antipsychotics and the newer ones (such as olanzapine and clozapine) are referred to as atypicals.

Some typical antipsychotics can be given as depot injections. This is so that you don't need to remember to take tablets every day.

Some examples are flupenthixol (Fluanxol), zuclopenthixol (Clopixol) and haloperidol (Haldol).

Are the antipsychotics safe to take?

It is usually safe to take antipsychotics regularly 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 epilepsy, diabetes, depression, myasthenia gravis, phaeochromocytoma, Parkinson's disease, glaucoma, suffer from heart, liver, breathing, kidney or prostate trouble.
- If you are pregnant, breastfeeding, or trying to or planning to become pregnant.

How should I take my antipsychotic 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 or pharmacist.

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.

When I feel better, can I stop taking them?

No. If you stop taking your antipsychotics, your original symptoms may return. This may not happen straight away and might occur three to six months after you stop the drug. You and your doctor should decide together when you can come off them.

Most people need to be on a typical antipsychotic for quite a long time, sometimes years. This is not thought to be harmful. Typical antipsychotics are not addictive.

What will happen to me when I start taking my typical antipsychotic?

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

You may get some side effects before you start to feel any better. Most side effects should go away after a few weeks. Some typical antipsychotics suit some people better than others. The table tells you what to do if you get any side effects.

Not all the typical antipsychotics have the side effects in the table. There are 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 any medicines that I should avoid or take care with?

Typical antipsychotics can interact with other medicines. Consult your doctor or pharmacist before starting new medicines and remember to tell your pharmacist what you are taking before purchasing medicines, e.g. over-the-counter medicines like antihistamines and cough and cold remedies.

What about alcohol and marijuana?

It is recommended that if you are taking typical antipsychotics that you should not drink alcohol, use marijuana, synthetic cannabis or take party pills ('herbal highs').

Alcohol, marijuana, synthetic cannabis and party pills can make some people drowsy and lessen the effect of antipsychotics. This could make you feel clumsy which can lead to falls or accidents.

As well as this, drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana, synthetic cannabis or taking party pills often makes your psychosis worse. Once you are used to your typical antipsychotics 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 this doesn't make you feel drowsy and clumsy, it is probably okay to drink small amounts. It pays to be very 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, marijuana, synthetic cannabis or party pills with these medicines.

Don't stop taking your medication just because you fancy a joint or a drink at the weekend.

What is the metabolic syndrome?

Antipsychotics can 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. When you start an antipsychotic, your weight, height and waist circumference will be measured. A reading of your heart (called an ECG) and a number of blood tests will be performed. 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 exercise.

Talk to your case manager or doctor for advice about this. They may also offer to refer you to a dietitian.

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 but be careful as internet-based information is not always accurate.

**Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy,
Annex Road, Christchurch
Telephone: (03) 339 1169**

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SIDE EFFECT	WHAT IS IT?	WHAT SHOULD I DO IF THIS HAPPENS TO ME?
Common		
Akathisia	Your feel restless and uncomfortable unless you are moving.	Tell your doctor about this. It may be possible to change your medicine or dose or prescribe you something to reduce this effect.
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 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 a 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.
Blurred vision	Things look fuzzy and you can't focus properly.	Don't drive. See your doctor if you are worried. This does not necessarily mean you need glasses.
Constipation	You can't or are struggling to 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.
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. If it is bad or worries you, tell your doctor who may prescribe you something to help.
Weight gain	Eating more and putting on weight.	Try and avoid putting on weight in the first place by eating a healthy diet full of vegetables and fibre. Do physical activities such as walking. Avoid fatty foods like chocolate, crisps and fizzy drinks. Ask to see a dietitian if you need help with food choices.
Uncommon		
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.
Palpitations	A fast heart beat.	It is not usually dangerous but talk to your doctor.
Urinary retention	Difficulty in passing urine or not much urine passed.	Contact your doctor now.
Raised prolactin.	Prolactin is a natural hormone we all have. High levels can cause a lack of interest in sex, affect periods in woman or impotence in men. It may also cause breast tenderness and milk secretion in men as well as women. Long term raised prolactin may cause osteoporosis.	Normally raised prolactin is not of concern unless its effects are troublesome. Discuss this with your doctor.

SIDE EFFECT	WHAT IS IT?	WHAT SHOULD I DO IF THIS HAPPENS TO ME?
Rare		
Photosensitivity	Your skin goes blotchy in the sun or has a purple appearance.	This can be common with chlorpromazine in particular. Avoid direct sunlight or sunlamps. Use a high factor sun block
Skin rash	Blotches seen anywhere.	Contact your doctor immediately
Very Rare		
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.
Agranulocytosis Neutropenia	Low numbers of white cells in the blood. You may get more infections.	Contact your doctor immediately if you have a sore throat, fever, or feel unwell in any way.