

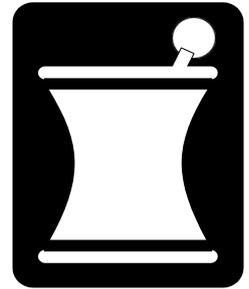
Weight gain and Metformin

Patient Information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

Some antipsychotic medications used to treat mental illnesses may cause some weight gain and this could lead to developing diabetes. These problems can have serious effects on your health.

This leaflet shows you how you can work with your doctor or nurse, to reduce the risk of this happening.

The doctor will also discuss with you whether there are any other side-effects that might occur with the medication you are prescribed.



What causes weight gain?

Weight gain happens when you consume more calories than you burn up as energy. Certain types of food contain high levels of calories, and the more food you eat the higher the amount of calories taken in by the body. Increasing your physical activity burns up more calories.

How does weight gain happen?

Some antipsychotic medications cause an increase in appetite. Most weight gain happens in the first six weeks of treatment. If this can be prevented, it is easier than trying to lose the weight at a later stage.

Mental illness itself, or the side-effects of medication, may mean that people have less energy and are less active than usual, making it harder to burn off excess calories.

Increase in blood fats (e.g. cholesterol and triglycerides) often occur because of an increase in weight.

What are the causes of diabetes mellitus?

Some people may develop diabetes mellitus. Diabetes mellitus is commonly known as “diabetes”. This is a condition in which your body does not handle glucose (sugar) as well as it should. This leads to high levels of glucose in the blood. It is due to both weight gain and increased difficulties in breaking down glucose by muscles.

Some people with a family history of diabetes are also more likely to develop it. Your doctor can monitor for early signs of this problem.

Why worry about these problems?

Together these side effects may cause a person to have an increased risk of developing heart disease (angina and heart attacks).

Diabetes also has its own complications. This includes an increased risk of developing problems with your eyes, kidneys and nerve damage to your feet.

What are the early signs that there might be a problem with diabetes?

Early warning signs are thirst and a need to pass increased amounts of urine. Signs of more serious high levels of glucose may rarely develop including vomiting, stomach pain, or drowsiness. Most often these things will be due to something else (such as stomach bug or the flu) but it is important that you are checked out urgently, by a doctor or nurse if you develop these problems.

How will my physical condition be monitored?

The doctor will measure your height, weight, waist circumference, and take your blood pressure regularly. Blood tests will also need to be done at regular intervals to monitor blood glucose and lipid levels in your body. The doctor will discuss the details of these blood tests with you.

We recommend that you weigh yourself every two weeks to monitor your weight.

Are there things that I can do?

It is important that you eat as healthily as you can. Avoid sugary drinks and junk food. Also you should increase the amount of exercise that you do. Your doctor, nurse or case manager can give you more information on diet and about other resources that may be helpful.

Can I see a dietitian?

Yes, if you would like to see a dietitian, please ask your doctor, nurse or case manager to make a referral.

Should I stop my antipsychotic medication if I am concerned?

No. There can be problems with stopping medication suddenly. You should discuss your concerns with your doctor who will discuss these with you and make a plan about how to manage them.

What about Metformin?

Metformin can be helpful to reduce weight if you have already put it on. It can also be helpful for keeping the weight off, if you are thought to be at a high risk of gaining weight when you start an antipsychotic.

How long should I take Metformin for?

If you start metformin at the same time as an antipsychotic, you may only need to take it for the first six to eight weeks of treatment. If the metformin is working for you, it may be prescribed for a longer period. Metformin will start to make a difference after a week and continue to make a difference longer term.

How do I take Metformin?

You will be started on a small dose with your main meal. This will be slowly increased to one tablet with breakfast, lunch and dinner. It is best taken with food to minimise it upsetting your stomach.

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

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