



Patient and Caregiver Information on Antipsychotic Drugs

The name of your medication is _____.

What is this drug used for?

The main uses of this class of drug are to treat psychosis and bipolar disorder. Psychosis can be a part of many illnesses like schizophrenia, major depression, and bipolar disorder. In children, studies show that some antipsychotic drugs are effective for reducing irritability in patients with autism, treating tic disorders or Tourette's disorder, and for reducing aggression. Ask your doctor if you are not sure why you are taking this drug.

Note: These medications may not have formal approval by regulatory agencies such as Health Canada or the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in children or adolescents for some or all of the above uses.

What symptoms will this drug help control?

Symptoms of psychosis may not be the same for each person. Some symptoms of psychosis that this drug can help with are:

- Hearing voices, seeing things or smelling, tasting or feeling things that are not real (hallucinations).
- Feeling that someone is trying to hurt you or is following you or that people are talking about you or that you have special powers or are famous (delusions).
- Finding it hard to think clearly, having thoughts that are speeded up or feeling like you don't have control of your thoughts.
- Becoming easily upset or overexcited.
- Showing diminished interest in yourself or others.

Your doctor may choose to use this medication for reasons not listed here. If you are not sure why this drug is being prescribed for you, please ask your doctor.

How quickly will this drug start working?

Some symptoms of psychosis may get better before others. Over the first few weeks, you may find that you sleep better and have fewer mood changes (feel too angry, sad or happy or have too much energy). Slowly, over the next 2–8 weeks, hallucinations or delusions fade away and your thoughts become clearer. Because antipsychotics take time to work, do NOT change your dose or stop your medication without talking to your doctor.

How long should you take this medication?

This depends on what type of illness you have and how well you do. If you are taking this medication to treat psychosis for the first time and do well on it, your doctor will likely want you to stay on it for at least 1–2 years. This will help stop you from getting sick again. If you have had symptoms of psychosis for many years or symptoms that go away but then come back, you may need to stay on this drug for a longer time. Talk with your doctor about how long you should stay on this medication.

How do you take this drug?

Antipsychotic drugs come in different forms:

- Fast-acting injection – used to control symptoms quickly.
- Liquid form or oral dissolving tablet – usually used for people who can't swallow tablets easily.
- Tablets or capsules – the most common way to take this drug.
- Sublingual tablets – tablets that dissolve or melt under the tongue without the need to swallow
- Long-acting or depot injection – drug is given in an injection once every 2–13 weeks. This is helpful if you can't remember to take your drug every day.

What side effects may happen?

Side effects may happen with any drug. They do not happen to everyone. Side effects may sometimes occur before beneficial effects of the medication are noticed. Many side effects get better or go away over time. If you think you may be having a side effect, speak to your doctor or pharmacist as they can help you decrease it or cope with it.

Common side effects of some antipsychotic drugs that you should tell your doctor about **RIGHT AWAY** are:

Extrapyramidal Side Effects (or EPSE): There are different kinds of EPSE. Try not to be scared if these symptoms happen to you because they can be treated.

- One kind of EPSE, called acute dystonia, can make your muscles stiff. This can make your neck tip back or turn to the side or cause your eyes to roll back up in your head or make your tongue feel bigger than normal, making it hard to swallow. This kind of EPSE most often happens in the first week that you start to take an antipsychotic drug. Call your doctor right away if you think you have this reaction and they can give you another medicine that should make you feel better within 10–15 minutes. If you experience difficulty breathing related to this reaction, go to your nearest hospital emergency room or call an ambulance.
- Another kind of EPSE, called akathisia, may make you feel restless, fidgety, or unable to sit or stand still.
- Another kind of EPSE, called parkinsonism, may make your hands shake or your body feel stiff and slow.

Common side effects that you should tell your doctor about at the **NEXT VISIT** include:

- Feeling sleepy or tired – this usually goes away over time. Be careful driving or during times when you need to be wide awake.
- Feeling dizzy – you may find you get dizzy or feel faint when you get up too fast from sitting or lying down. Getting up more slowly or sitting on the side of your bed with your feet on the floor before getting up will help. This side effect usually goes away over time.
- Dry mouth – sugarless hard candy or gum, ice cubes, or popsicles can help. Do not drink sugar-containing soft drinks to help your dry mouth as they may give you cavities and increase your weight. Brush your teeth daily and visit your dentist regularly.
- Blurred vision – may happen when you first start to take this drug and may last for 1–2 weeks. Reading under a bright light or moving the book further away to read may help. If the problem lasts for more than a few weeks, let your doctor know.

- Constipation – drink water, try to increase the amount of fiber in your diet (like fruits, vegetables or bran), and exercise your abdominal muscles. Some individuals find a bulk laxative like psyllium (e.g., Metamucil) or PEG 3350 (e.g., Miralax, Pegalax) or a stool softener like docusate (e.g., Colace, Surfak) helps regulate their bowels. If this does not work or if you go more than 3 days without having a bowel movement, call your doctor or pharmacist.
- Weight gain – the best way to limit weight gain is to watch how much you eat and avoid eating fatty foods (like cakes, ice cream) or foods high in sugar (like soft drinks or energy drinks). Exercise can also help. Your doctor should check your weight, cholesterol (a type of body fat), and sugar levels from time to time.
- Increased thirst or peeing more often – let your doctor know. Your doctor may want to check your blood sugar.
- Nausea or heartburn – try taking your drug with food if this happens.
- For adolescents: changes in sex drive or sexual performance – discuss this with your doctor.
- Effects in women – some antipsychotic drugs may cause changes in how regular your monthly periods are or cause you to miss your period. It may also cause your breasts to leak milk. Talk with your doctor if this happens to you as these effects can be treated.
- Tardive dyskinesia – may occur in people taking antipsychotic drugs (usually the older agents) for many years. Tardive dyskinesia happens when some of your body muscles, usually in your face (lips and tongue), fingers, or toes, move on their own, without you making them do so. Your doctor may periodically examine you for any signs of tardive dyskinesia as picking them up early and taking action (depending on how you are doing, your doctor may decide to stop your drug or change to another drug) can help increase the chance that this side effect will go away.

Rare side effects you should tell your doctor about **RIGHT AWAY** are:

- Skin rash or itching
- Really bad headache
- Constant dizziness or fainting, breathing too fast or feeling like your heart is skipping or missing beats
- Fever, nausea, vomiting, appetite loss or feeling tired, confused, really thirsty, weak or like you have a flu
- Sore mouth, gums or throat
- Yellow tinge in the eyes or to the skin; dark-colored urine (pee)
- Going more than 12 hours without peeing
- Going more than 3 days without having a bowel movement
- Fever (temperature above 38 degrees Celsius/100 degrees Fahrenheit) with muscle stiffness
- Sudden weakness or numbing in the face, arms or legs or difficulty seeing or talking
- Thoughts of suicide

Let your doctor know **right away** if you miss your period or think you may be **pregnant**, plan to become pregnant, or are breastfeeding.

What should you do if you forget to take a dose of your medication?

If it is almost time for your next dose, just skip the missed one. Do NOT take two doses at the same time.

Is this drug safe to take with other medication?

Antipsychotic drugs can change the effect of other drugs that you are taking or they may be affected by other drugs. Always check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any drugs, including those that you are taking or plan to take, those you can buy without a prescription (like cold remedies), and herbal medications (like St. John's Wort, ginseng, and many others).

What else do I need to know about antipsychotic drugs?

1. Do not change your dose or stop it without talking to your doctor.
2. If you take asenapine (Saphris) let the tablet melt under your tongue and do not eat or drink for 10 minutes afterwards. Most other antipsychotic drugs can be taken with meals or with water, milk or orange juice. Do NOT take them with apple juice or grapefruit juice as these may change the amount of drug in your body.
3. If you take ziprasidone (Geodon/Zeldox) or lurasidone (Latuda), make sure you take your tablets with meals. If you take risperidone liquid (Risperdal oral solution), do NOT take it with caffeine-containing soft drinks or with tea.
4. Risperidone, olanzapine, and aripiprazole oral dissolving tablets (Risperdal M-tab, Zyprexa Zydis, and Abilify Discmelt) dissolve rapidly in saliva and can be taken with or without liquid. They can also break easily. Do NOT push tablets through foil backing as this could damage tablets. Use dry hands to remove tablet and immediately place tablet on tongue.
5. Do not split, crush or chew quetiapine (Seroquel XR) or paliperidone (Invega) tablets.
6. If you take paliperidone (Invega), you may see the tablet shell in your stool. This is normal.
7. Do not break or crush your drug unless you have been told to do so by your doctor.
8. This drug may increase the effects of alcohol, making you more sleepy and less alert. If taken together with alcohol, this may make it dangerous for you to drive, operate machinery, or perform tasks that require careful attention.
9. This drug may affect your body's ability to control body temperature, so be cautious or avoid places that are very hot and humid, like saunas and hot tubs.
10. Antacids (like Diovol, Maalox, Amphogel, etc.) may lower the amount of drug in your body. Take your antacid at least 2 hours before or 1 hour after taking your antipsychotic drug to avoid this.
11. Some people who take this drug may get badly sunburnt even without being in direct sun for a long time. Avoid direct sun, wear protective clothes, and use sunscreen.
12. Drinking a lot of caffeine (coffee, teas, caffeine-containing soft drinks, etc.) can cause you to become easily upset or jittery and make it harder for this drug to work.
13. Cigarette smoking can change the amount of this drug in your body, so let your doctor know if you smoke or if you stop smoking or change how much you smoke.
14. Stopping your drug all of a sudden ("cold turkey") may make you ill. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist first about how to stop it safely.
15. Keep your medication in a clean, dry area at room temperature. Keep all medication out of the reach of children.

If you have any questions about antipsychotic drugs, please ask your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse.