



Medications for Mental Health: A Fact Sheet to Share

Medication can be an important part of treatment for mental health disorders. Psychotropic medications work to correct imbalances in brain chemistry to treat symptoms and facilitate proper brain function. Psychotropic medications can treat illnesses and reduce or eliminate symptoms such as sleep disturbance, loss of appetite, physical pain, mood swings, agitation, panic, hallucinations, etc. When proper brain function is restored, individuals usually regain energy, motivation, concentration, social function and physical health.

Talking with Your Doctor

Before taking any new medication, it is important that your doctor is aware of all aspects of your health, such as the age-related physical changes, health conditions, and all medications you take (including over-the-counter). Older adults have a decreased ability to absorb and metabolize medications, and are often more vulnerable to their effects. Over 75% of people over the age of 65 take a prescription medication and the average number of medications that they may be using at any given time is five. Given these concerns, you should be sure that your doctor understands all aspects of your health and you understand as much as you can about the new medication.

Questions to Ask before Taking a New Medication

- What is the name of the medication and what is it for?
- How and when should it be taken?
- Should certain foods, drinks, medications or alcohol be avoided with this medicine?
- When should I expect the medicine to begin to work? How will I know if it is working?
- Is this medicine safe with the other prescription and non-prescription (over-the-counter) medications I take?
- Are there any side effects? What are they? What should I do if they occur?
- Can I get a refill? If yes, when?
- How should I store this medicine?

Starting a New Medication

Your doctor will likely start you on a low dosage of the new medication and will slowly increase the dosage to determine at what point it works for your body. For this reason, you must give the medication time to work. It can take up to six weeks for you to feel the full benefits of a psychotropic medication. For a medication to be effective it must be taken **exactly** as prescribed and not just when a person is feeling bad.

Because some medications can cause fatigue, confusion, headache, nausea or dizziness, they may be prescribed to be taken at bedtime or with food. Some of the newer medications tend to have fewer side effects and seem to be tolerated more easily by many older adults. Medication adjustments may be needed to find out what works most effectively for an individual. Over time, the prescriber may change dosages or may change medications altogether until the most effective medication is determined. Once the appropriate medication and dosage are found, the older person needs to understand that he/she will likely continue to take it for a number of months to prevent a recurrence of symptoms. If a person has a history of severe or recurring mental illness, life-long medication may be needed. Always talk with your health care provider before stopping or adding any medication and **never** share medications with other people.

Paying for Medications

Medications can be costly. Any concerns about paying for medications should be shared with the prescriber in case there is a lower-cost option or a special program to assist with medication costs. There are many pharmaceutical companies that offer payment assistance. There are also state programs that can assist with medication access and costs. These programs are known to specialists through the local Area Agency on Aging.

More information can be found on the website www.mdaging.org

If you would like more information or assistance, contact Kim Burton at:

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