

# Tips for Taking Medication



Medications can be an effective way to treat mental disorders. Medications treat the signs of mental disorders. They cannot cure you. But they may make you feel better. Medications affect people in unique ways. No one can tell ahead of time how your body will respond. Sometimes you need to try several medications before you can find the right one. You need to work with your doctor to find what works best for you.

## Tell Your Doctor What You Take

Medications for mental illness can cause unsafe side effects when taken with some other medications. This is why your doctor needs to know about all the medications you take. This includes prescription and over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal supplements. You should also tell your doctor if you drink alcohol or take drugs because they can affect the way your other medications work.

## Forms of Medications

The medications you take for your mental illness may be

- Pills that you swallow
- Liquid that you drink
- Shots that you get once or twice a month

## Watch for Side Effects

Tell your doctor right away about any strange reactions (like skin rashes, fast heartbeat, or swelling). He or she may change the dose or give you a different medication. Always talk with your doctor about any side effects that might occur before you start a medication.

Things that can affect how medications work for you include:

- Your type of mental disorder, such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia
- Your age, sex, and body size
- Other illnesses you may have
- If you smoke or drink alcohol
- How well your liver and kidneys work
- Other medications and herbal/vitamin supplements you take
- Your diet
- Whether you take your medications the way your doctor tells you

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## Do Not Stop Your Medications Without Your Doctor's Okay

You must take your medication the way your doctor tells you. Do not stop taking it just because you feel better or because you feel you do not need it anymore. Talk to your doctor first. When your doctor says it is okay to stop taking a medication, it should be stopped slowly, not all at once.

**Never stop taking a medication without asking your doctor for help.**

You and your family can help your doctor find the right medication (or medications) for you. Tell your doctor about your medical history; family history; any allergies you have; other medications, supplements, or herbals you take; and other details about your overall health. You or a family member should ask these questions when a medication is prescribed:

- What is the name of the medication?
- What is the medication supposed to do?
- How and when should I take it?
- How much should I take?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- When and how should I stop taking it?
- Will it interact with other medications I take?
- Do I need to avoid any types of food or drink while taking this medication? What should I avoid?

- Should it be taken with or without food?
- Is it safe to drink alcohol while taking this medication?
- What are the side effects? What should I do if I experience them?
- Is the Patient Information for the medication available?

After taking the medication for a short time, tell your doctor how you feel, if you have any side effects, and any concerns you have about the medication.

Medications for mental illness are taken by all types of people, but some have special needs, including:

- Children
- Older adults
- Women who are pregnant or may become pregnant

If you are in one of the groups above, be sure to ask your doctor how the medication will affect you and what you should be careful of when taking it.

## Remember

Medications can help you feel better. You should always take them exactly the way your doctor tells you to. Never stop taking a medication without your doctor's help. Always ask questions about a medication before you start taking it.

## Want to Know More?

### National Alliance on Mental Illness

3803 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 100

Arlington, VA 22203

nami.org

Phone: 703-524-7600

800-950-NAMI (6264) (toll free)

