

Antipsychotic medications: A brief guide

Antipsychotics are medications developed to treat symptoms of psychosis. They are broadly classified into **first-generation (typical)** and **second-generation (atypical)**, with the two groups having different side-effect profiles.

First-generation (Typical) Antipsychotics

First-generation antipsychotics tend to produce more movement-related side effects. They can come in oral or injectable-depot forms.

Examples include:

- Chlorpromazine (Thorazine, Largactil)
- Haloperidol (Haldol, Serenace)
- Trifluoperazine (Stelazine)
- Flupenthixol Decanoate (Fluanxol)
- Zuclopenthixol (Clopixol)

Side-effects include:

- Extrapyramidal symptoms (tremors, rigidity, restlessness)
- Sedation, dizziness, light-headedness
- Dry mouth, blurred vision, constipation
- Skin sensitivity to light (especially Chlorpromazine)

Anticholinergic Drugs

These medications are used to counteract the extrapyramidal side-effects of antipsychotic medications, such as stiffness and tremors. In so doing, they help with making the antipsychotic medication better tolerated.

Examples include:

- Benzhexol (Artane)
- Benztropine (Congentin)

Potential side-effects are may include:

- Dry mouth
- Sedation
- Constipation
- Blurred vision
- Urinary retention

Second-generation (Atypical) Antipsychotics

As compared to first-generation antipsychotics, second-generation antipsychotics drugs produce less movement-related disorders and are considered to be more effective for negative symptoms in psychosis, such as apathy and withdrawal. Examples include:

- Clozapine (Clozaril) : This is the drug shown to be most effective for patient with treatment-resistant psychotic disorders. However, in rare situations it can cause white blood cell levels to decrease, reducing the ability of an individual's body to fight off infections.

Clozapine's other side effects can include:

- Sedation, dizziness, lowered blood pressure
 - Constipation
 - Weight gain, raised blood sugars
 - Increased salivation
 - Increased heart rate
- Risperidone (Risperdal)
 - Olanzapine (Zyprexa)
 - Quetiapine (Seroquel)

Apart from their efficacy in managing symptoms of psychosis, the three medications listed above also help with reducing feelings of irritability, agitation, aggression and mood swings. They can help with stabilization of the mood. Their side effects can include:

- Weight gain, raised blood sugars
- Restlessness
- Drowsiness, lowered blood pressure
- Abdominal pain, indigestion
- Sexual side effects

Precaution

When using medications that can cause drowsiness, care should be taken when driving or operating machinery.

Concurrent use of alcohol and/or traditional Chinese medications with the medications listed above can lead to erratic absorption, which would make their effects difficult to predict.

The information provided serves as psycho-education and not a guide for self-medication. The information contained herein is not intended to cover all possible uses, directions, precautions, warnings, drug interactions, allergic reactions, or adverse effects. Please consult your psychiatrist before taking any medication.



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