



American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists (aapp.org)

# Time for a Change: How to Know When to Make a Dose Adjustment

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## What is a dose adjustment?

- A dose adjustment is when the amount of medication that you take is raised or lowered.

**Remember: Mental health medication should only be changed or stopped with the help of a health care provider.**

## How to know if a mental health medication is working:

- People living with mental illness may use medications and therapy to make symptoms better.
- Members of the health care team may check related symptoms to track progress in treatment.
- There is no blood test or scan that checks for mental illness, so the health care team may check for symptoms using forms that rate symptoms on a scale or just by asking about them.
- The health care team may also ask for a blood sample to check a drug level. Drug levels are used to make sure the dose of a medication is high enough that it should work, but not too high that there could be side effects. It is common to get drug levels for some mental health medications called mood stabilizers, like lithium and valproic acid, or antipsychotics, like clozapine.

## Symptoms of depression

- More or less sleep
- Less interest in activities
- Feeling guilty
- Less energy
- Hard to focus
- More or less hungry
- Feeling restless
- Wanting to harm self

## Symptoms of anxiety

- Worry
- Fast heartbeat
- Feeling on edge
- Tight muscles
- Hard to focus
- Less sleep
- Less energy

## How do you know if it is time for a different dose?

- Medication doses may need to be lowered if there are side effects. Medications can have many different side effects. For example, antidepressants can cause stomach upset when first started and can have sexual side effects like lowering the sex drive. Antipsychotics can cause weight gain, feeling tired, higher blood sugar, or heart rhythm problems. Other possible side effects of mental health medications include headache, feeling dizzy, dry mouth, trouble sleeping, and more. It is important to talk to a health care provider if any side effects are noticed.

- When some medications are stopped too fast, symptoms may feel worse, or side effects may develop. For example, if an antidepressant is stopped too fast, there can be symptoms that feel like the flu, nausea, feeling dizzy, or trouble sleeping. To avoid this, your provider may recommend that the dose of the current medication be slowly lowered until it is stopped.
- For some people living with mental illness, starting a medication can cause new symptoms of another mental illness. For example, a new antidepressant can cause symptoms of mania if someone has bipolar disorder.
  - Symptoms of mania
    - More energy
    - Little need for sleep
    - Talking too much or too fast
    - Risky behaviors like excessive gambling



Go online to find more information and to view the references for this toolkit.

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