American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists (aapp.org)

What to Expect From Your Medications

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- Antidepressant and antipsychotic medications may take 6 weeks or more to fully work.
- Discuss all side effects with a health care provider. Some side effects may get better as the body gets used to the medication.
- Some people need medications for a short time and others need it long-term.
- If a person stops taking medication suddenly, problems with depression, anxiety, mood or thinking may come back. The person may also feel signs of withdrawal.
- It is very important to talk to a health care provider before suddenly stopping these medications.

Antidepressants

Antidepressant medications are used to help with symptoms of depression and anxiety. Symptoms of depression can be sad mood, hopelessness, guilt, and low energy.[1] Symptoms of anxiety can be worries that are hard to control, feeling on edge, and poor concentration.[2]

When will the medication work?[1,2,3]

- In the first few days, the person may notice improved sleeping and eating habits.
- In the first 1-3 weeks, the person may have improved memory, sex drive, and self-care habits. They may also notice an increase in energy and less anxiety.
- After 2-4 weeks, the person may notice an improvement in mood, decreased feelings of hopelessness, and less suicidal thoughts. They may also start to feel interested in hobbies again.
- It may take 6-8 weeks for the medication to fully work.

What are the common side effects?[1,4]

These are most common shortly after starting medication and usually get better within 1-2 weeks.

- Headache
- Upset stomach, diarrhea
- Sleepiness or feeling more awake

Some antidepressants can cause sexual problems, such as a decrease in sex drive or problems with ejaculation.

How long do people need to take this medication?[1,2]

Some people need to take medication for up to 1 year after they feel better. Others may need to take medication long-term to prevent their symptoms of depression or anxiety from returning . The length of time depends on the severity of the depression or anxiety, how long the person has been experiencing it , and how many times they have had depression or anxiety in the past.

Antipsychotics

Antipsychotic medications are used to help with mood stability and problems with clear thinking. They also help with hearing voices, seeing things that are not there (hallucinations), and having ideas that are not based in real life (delusions).[5]

When will the medication work?[5,6]

- In the first 1-3 days, the person may feel less upset or angry.
- After 1-2 weeks, the person may have a better and/or more stable mood and self-care habits. The person may start to have more clear thoughts, less hallucinations, and less delusions.
- It may take 4-6 weeks for the medication to fully work.

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What are the common side effects?[5]

These are most common shortly after starting medication and usually get better with time.

- Sleepiness
- Dizziness
- Upset stomach
- Increased appetite (may or may not improve with time)

Some side effects may not arise until later and need regular monitoring, such as:

- Increased appetite/weight gain
- Increased blood sugar
- Increased cholesterol
- Abnormal or unexpected movements

How long do people need to take this medication?

Some people need to take medication for 1 to 2 years after their mood or thinking gets better. Others need to take medication long-term to stop their mood and thinking from getting worse. The length of time depends on the severity of mood symptoms, how long the person had been experiencing them, and how many times they have had similar problems in the past.

Go online to find more information about what to expect from your medications and to view the references for this toolkit.

https://aapp.org/resource/patients

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