

RECOVERY TOOLS: Tips for People Who Take Medication

What should you do if your doctor suggested you take medication to help you with a mental health issue? It is important that you and your doctor work together. Your doctor knows about medications. Don't be afraid to ask questions. For example, how will the medication help you live a better life? What changes should you look for to know the medication is working? What are common side effects? What are serious side effects? Share information about yourself. For example, cultural beliefs, financial considerations, concerns about medication, and past experience taking medication. The following are some general suggestions for people taking medications. For more complete information, talk with your doctor, pharmacist, or therapist.

Taking Medications

Don't stop taking your medication, even if you feel better. If you stop, your issues or distressing symptoms may return. You could even become worse and end up in the hospital. If you want to stop taking your medication, it is important to consult with your doctor for medical advice. You should also talk to your therapist.

Don't Ignore Side Effects

If your medication makes you feel bad, or makes it hard to do the things you enjoy, talk with your doctor. Your doctor may want to try another medication with fewer side effects or suggest ways to manage the side effects. Some side effects are only a nuisance. Other side effects can be dangerous.

Always Keep A Supply Of Medicine

Running out of medication (even for a few days) is bad for your health. Call to make a doctor's appointment at least two weeks before you run out. Don't wait until the last minute or the doctor may not be able to see you in time. If you run out of medication, contact your doctor right away. Ask for help getting your medication as soon as possible.

Ask If You Don't Know

It's important that you understand how to take your medication. Make sure you know how much, what time of day, and whether or not you should take your medication with food. Many things can affect how well your medication works for you. Smoking, alcohol and drug use, over-the-counter medication, and even the food you eat can change the effectiveness of your medication. If you don't know ask your doctor.

Don't Take Another Person's Medication

What works for a friend may not work for you. It can even harm you. Only take medication that is prescribed for you. We've listed some special measures you should take if you are taking certain medications.

Anti-Psychotic Medication

Newer medications include, *clozapine (Clozaril)*, *aripiprazole (Abilify)*, *olanzapine (Zyprexa)*, *risperidone (Risperdal)*, and others. Older medications include, *haloperidol (Haldol)*, *chlorpromazine (Thorazine)*, *loxapine*, and

others. Most of these medications can make you tired or sleepy. Always avoid alcohol. Drinking alcohol increases the drowsy effect. Large amounts of caffeine (contained in coffee, tea, colas, chocolate, and some over-the-counter medicine) can make these medications less effective.

Mood Stabilizers

Mood stabilizers include *Lithium, valproic acid (Depakote), carbamazine (Tegretol), lamotrigine (Lamictal) and others*. Except for Lithium, many mood stabilizers are anti-seizure medications. Use caffeine and salt in moderation when taking Lithium. Changes in caffeine or salt intake can change your blood level. Dehydration puts you at greater risk for lithium toxicity. Lithium toxicity happens when the drug builds up in your body. Avoid dehydration by drinking lots of fluids (eight to 10 glasses of water a day). It is important that you speak to your doctor right away if you have changes in your mood such as worsening symptoms of depression.

Anti-Anxiety Medications

Medications used to treat anxiety include, *escitalopram (Lexapro), paroxetine (Paxil), sertraline (Zoloft), citalopram (Celexa), clonazepam (Klonopin), alprazolam (Xanax), diazepam (Valium), and others*. *Klonopin, Xanax, and Valium belong to a class of drugs called benzodiazepines (sometimes called "benzos")*. These medications are meant for short term use.

Warning: Combining benzodiazepines with opioid medications such as *Suboxone, Buprenorphine, Oxycodone, Methadone, Fentanyl*, and others can put you at risk for

an **overdose or death**. Avoid drinking alcohol.

Antidepressants

Antidepressant medications include, *fluoxetine (Prozac), sertraline (Zoloft), escitalopram (Lexapro), paroxetine (Paxil)* and others. Older medications include, *imipramine (Tofranil), amitriptyline, nortriptyline (Pamelor), amoxapine (Asendin)*, and others. Alcohol can interfere with the action of these medications. Some also cause dry mouth and constipation. Chewing gum helps with the dry mouth. Drinking water, eating vegetables, whole grains, and fresh fruits can help with constipation.

Other Things To Remember

Many medications for mental health issues make people very sensitive to the sun. When the weather is hot, try to stay indoors. If you have to be outside, drink plenty of fluids (eight to 10 glasses of water a day). Always use sunscreen. Avoid alcohol and street drugs. In addition to taking your medication, the process of recovery requires making choices that help you live a life with meaning and purpose.

Medical Emergencies

If you believe you are having a medical emergency call 9-1-1 immediately and go to the nearest emergency room.