

# Antipsychotic Medications – An Overview

Antipsychotic medications are a group of psychiatric medications used to manage a range of mental health conditions. This leaflet provides general information about antipsychotic medications and how they are used in psychiatric care.

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## What Are Antipsychotic Medications?

Antipsychotic medications are used to help manage symptoms related to:

- Psychosis (such as hallucinations or delusional beliefs)
- Severe mood disturbance
- Significant agitation or behavioural dysregulation

They are used **only when clinically appropriate** and are part of a broader treatment plan.

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## Antipsychotics Are Used for Different Conditions

Despite the name, antipsychotic medications are not used only for psychotic disorders.

They may also be used in:

- Bipolar disorder
- Severe depression with specific features
- Certain anxiety or behavioural presentations
- Other conditions where symptoms affect safety or functioning

Use depends on symptoms, not labels.

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## What Antipsychotics Aim to Do

Antipsychotic medications aim to:

- Reduce distressing symptoms
- Improve clarity of thinking
- Reduce agitation or emotional intensity
- Support stability and functioning

They are not intended to sedate or control a person unnecessarily.

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## How Antipsychotics Work (General)

Antipsychotics act on brain systems involved in:

- Perception and interpretation of reality
- Thought processes
- Emotional regulation

Their effects develop over time and are monitored closely.

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## Timeframe for Effect

Antipsychotic medications:

- May reduce some symptoms relatively quickly
- Often require weeks for full effect
- May need dose adjustment or review

Response varies between individuals.

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## Side Effects

Side effects vary depending on the medication and individual.

Possible side effects may include:

- Sedation or fatigue
- Changes in weight or appetite
- Muscle stiffness or restlessness
- Changes in blood sugar or cholesterol

Monitoring helps identify and manage side effects early.

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## Monitoring and Physical Health

Antipsychotic treatment involves careful monitoring, which may include:

- Weight and blood pressure checks
- Blood tests
- Review of movement or restlessness

Monitoring is an essential part of safe care.

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## Long-Term Use

Some people require antipsychotic medication for:

- Short periods
- Longer-term stability

Long-term use is reviewed regularly, balancing benefits and risks.

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## Adherence and Review

Consistent use helps:

- Reduce relapse risk
- Allow accurate assessment of benefit

Treatment is reviewed regularly and adjusted as needed.

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## Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

Use of antipsychotic medications in pregnancy or breastfeeding requires careful consideration.

If pregnancy is:

- Planned
- Possible
- Confirmed

This should be discussed promptly.

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## Stopping or Changing Antipsychotics

Antipsychotics should:

- Not be stopped suddenly
- Be changed or reduced gradually under medical guidance

Sudden changes can increase relapse risk.

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## Addressing Concerns and Stigma

Concerns about antipsychotic medication are common.

It is important to understand that:

- Use of these medications does not define a person
- Decisions are based on symptoms and safety
- Treatment is individualised

Questions and concerns should be discussed openly.

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## Summary

Antipsychotic medications are an important treatment option for some people with severe or distressing symptoms.

With careful monitoring and review, they can support stability, safety, and improved functioning.

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