

Starting Psychiatric Medication: What to Expect

Starting psychiatric medication can raise questions and concerns. This leaflet explains what to expect when beginning medication and how it is managed as part of your care.

Why Medication May Be Recommended

Medication may be recommended to help:

- Reduce the severity of symptoms
- Improve day-to-day functioning
- Support recovery alongside other treatments

Medication is prescribed only where it is considered **clinically appropriate**.

Before Starting Medication

Before medication is started, your psychiatrist may:

- Review your symptoms and history
- Discuss potential benefits and risks
- Consider previous medication responses
- Review other medications you are taking
- Discuss alternatives where appropriate

You will have the opportunity to ask questions before deciding whether to proceed.

How Medication Is Started

Psychiatric medications are usually:

- Started at a **low dose**
- Increased gradually if needed

This approach helps improve tolerability and safety.

What You May Notice Initially

In the early stages, you may notice:

- Mild side effects
- Little or no immediate improvement
- Gradual changes over days to weeks

This is common and does not mean the medication will not be helpful.

Timeframe for Improvement

Most psychiatric medications:

- Take **time to work**
- Show benefits gradually

It may take several weeks to assess whether a medication is effective.

Side Effects

Some people experience side effects, especially early on.

Side effects:

- Are often mild and temporary
- May improve as your body adjusts

If side effects are troubling or persistent, they should be discussed during follow-up appointments.

Importance of Follow-Up

Follow-up appointments are important to:

- Review response to medication
- Monitor side effects
- Adjust the dose or medication if needed

Medication management is an **ongoing process**, not a one-time decision.

Taking Medication as Prescribed

To reduce risks:

- Take medication as prescribed
- Avoid changing doses without advice
- Inform your psychiatrist of any concerns

If you miss a dose, do not double up unless advised.

Alcohol, Other Substances, and Medication

Alcohol and other substances can:

- Interact with psychiatric medications
- Reduce effectiveness
- Increase side effects

Please discuss substance use openly during appointments.

Stopping or Changing Medication

Medication should not be:

- Stopped suddenly
- Changed without medical guidance

If medication needs to be changed or stopped, this is planned carefully.

Questions and Concerns

If you have concerns about starting medication, you are encouraged to discuss these with your psychiatrist.

Informed discussion and realistic expectations support safe and effective treatment.
