



Safe Use of Psychoactive Medications

WHAT ARE PSYCHOACTIVE MEDICATIONS?



Psychoactive medications are drugs that are used to treat mood and thought disorders by way of their effect on the chemicals in the brain. **As with any drug, there is a potential for serious side effects.** When drugs are taken long-term, there may be a greater chance for side effects. **It is important to understand that not all behaviors and symptoms need to be treated with psychoactive medications.** Classes of psychoactive medications include antidepressants, antipsychotics/neuroleptics, mood stabilizers, sedative/hypnotics, stimulants, and anti-anxiety drugs.

HOW CAN CAREGIVERS EFFECTIVELY SUPPORT PEOPLE WHO RECEIVE PSYCHOACTIVE MEDICATIONS?

- * **Do not stop medications suddenly unless directed by the doctor!**
- * **Check with the doctor and pharmacist about multiple drug interactions.**



Look for other reasons for the behavior before starting medications

- ✓ Could the person have pain that causes the behavior?
- ✓ Does the person have a hearing or vision problem that hasn't been detected?
- ✓ Has the person had a fall or injury that wasn't noticed?
- ✓ Could the person have an undetected medical problem, such as a thyroid problem or a vitamin deficiency?

Know why the person is taking each medication

- ✓ There should be a clear reason for the use of each medication

Has the medication helped the problem it is being used for?

- ✓ Keep records of the behavior or symptoms the medication is being used to treat and bring it to appointments with the health care provider
- ✓ Keep records of how prescribed drugs have helped or worsened behaviors

Has the medication caused any side effects or created more problems?

- ✓ Know the person's baseline, or normal, appearance and behaviors and report any changes to primary care provider
- ✓ Sometimes challenging behaviors respond to a decrease in medications.

General changes to report when using any medication (not all people experience all side effects):



Sudden or unusual **skin color or temperature:**

- ✓ Bluish, red, yellow or pallor
- ✓ Rash or other unusual markings
- ✓ Feels hot or cold to the touch



Sudden or unusual **bowel or **urinary** change:**

- ✓ Diarrhea or constipation
- ✓ Frequent or infrequent urination
- ✓ Urination difficult, delayed or painful
- ✓ Bedwetting



Sudden or unusual **walking or **gait** changes:**

- ✓ Falling down
- ✓ Slow or shuffling walk
- ✓ Stumbling, poor balance, unsure of footing



Sudden or unusual change in **movement level or in **muscles**:**

- ✓ Seems slow, moves in slow motion, trouble getting started
- ✓ Jittery, antsy, pacing, can't sit still, constantly jiggling or pumping legs, has to get out of chair after short period of time
- ✓ Muscle rigidity or stiffness
- ✓ Nausea, vomiting or gas



Sudden or unusual change in **sleep:**

- ✓ Sleeps longer or shorter
- ✓ Trouble getting to sleep
- ✓ Nightmares or bad dreams



Sudden or unexpected change in **eating or **drinking**:**

- ✓ Eating more or less
- ✓ Drinking more or less



Sudden or unexpected change in **speech:**

- ✓ Drooling or dry mouth
- ✓ Seems to be slurring speech
- ✓ Doesn't seem to be talking much any more



Sudden or unexpected **fatigue:**

- ✓ Suddenly doesn't want to get up in the morning
- ✓ Tired, day-time sleeping
- ✓ Sedation, lethargy, malaise
- ✓ Grogginess



Sudden or unexpected **mood changes:**

- ✓ Grouchy, irritable, hard to get along with
- ✓ Explosive behavior out of character
- ✓ Crying, tearful, sad, withdrawn
- ✓ Personality change



Sudden or unexpected trouble **concentrating:**

- ✓ Trouble paying attention and remembering things
- ✓ Trouble performing activity, work, or play