

General Information About Taking Psychiatric Medications – some things to expect

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Medication can greatly decrease symptoms and help a person return to a functional level; however, every case is unique, and medications are not perfect. It will likely take a long, frustrating trial-and-error process before a treatment regimen is found that works best for the patient.

When a psychiatrist prescribes any medication, some good things to ask are:

- What symptoms does this medication primarily treat?
- What are the common side effects?
- What dosage is being prescribed?
- How long will it take to start working?

Keep track of every medication (and at what dosage) you (or your loved one) is on, what side effects it causes, which symptoms get better and which get worse. A journal (the same journal where you write down symptoms and behaviors) is an excellent place to do this.

Don't be surprised if the doctor keeps switching medications, or adjusting dosages. They are not frivolously experimenting; trial-and-error is the only way to eventually find a combination that works. Medications are never a perfect fit: a prescription can work for awhile and then stop working, or one that you tried previously may work at some point in the future. You can help this process with feedback about the different medications (see paragraph above).

An antipsychotic medication can take weeks or even months to start working at full strength, so be patient and keep recording things in your journal. Medications are less likely to make any huge, noticeable changes in life; instead they should make things generally "easier." Once you find a medication that seems to work, the voices/hallucinations may gradually fade away and disappear - or they may not. Sometimes these voices quiet down to a point where they are not harmful or debilitating, and many people with schizophrenia make a decision at this point that living with these quieter voices in the background is preferable to going through the pain of more medication and more side-effects.

Some general things to be aware of:

- Both the illness itself and many of the medications used to treat it can make a person feel overly tired or lethargic
- You may need to sleep more than you think
- It may be unrealistic to try and dive head-on back into your normal activities
- Plan small goals to ease yourself back into a routine that you enjoy, and don't expect too

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- much of yourself at first in terms of socializing
- Be aware if others are pushing you too hard to "get back out there" - give yourself the time and support you need

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