

Psychiatric Medication Management

The cause of mental illness is not yet fully understood, but it is thought that both your biology and your stress level can contribute to the development of mental illness symptoms. Medications and coping strategies can help reduce your biological predisposition (vulnerability) and treat your symptoms of mental illness. They can be powerful tools in your journey toward recovery. This educational handout is designed to support you in taking your medications effectively.

How can medications help with my symptoms?

- It is possible that mental illnesses are related to an imbalance of chemicals in the cells of the brain. Taking prescribed medications can work to correct the imbalance.
- By taking your medications regularly, you can lower the intensity of many symptoms, and specifically improve your concentration, mood, and ability to achieve your goals. Making your medications a priority over time can decrease your symptoms, prevent relapses and hospital stays, and improve the quality of your life.
- You can move toward recovery by being informed about your prescribed medications and taking them regularly. Talk to your nurse or health care provider if you need education about a specific medication.

What should I ask my health care provider about my medication?

- How will the medicine benefit me?
- How long will it take for the medication to work?
- What are the possible side effects and what can be done about them?
- Will I need any blood test monitoring for these medications?
- Are there any alternatives?

What are some myths about taking medications?

- *I feel better now, so I don't need to take my medication.*
- *I'll become dependent or addicted to the medications.*
- *The medications will change who I am.*
- *I should be able to make myself better without medication.*
- *I can take herbal medications instead of the medication my doctor recommends.*

How can I take my medication safely?

- Take your medication at the same time every day.
- Use an alarm on your phone or watch as a reminder, or ask a supportive person to remind you.
- Remember that it can take time for you and your doctor to find the most effective medication for you.
- Schedule your medication along with another daily activity such as eating breakfast or brushing your teeth.
- Put the medication in a certain place where you will see it every day such as near your toothbrush or car keys.
- Use a pill box that dispenses your daily doses.
- Use a calendar to remember to take your medication and get lab work done that is ordered by your doctor.
- Work with your health care provider to simplify your medication schedule as much as possible so that medications are taken at the same time and fewer times per day.
- Call your doctor if you are going to run out of medication in the next week.
- If you cannot afford your medication, ask your social worker, or health care provider if there are any alternatives or medication assistance options.

Why is it important to take my medications every day?

- The medications are more effective in relieving symptoms.
- The medications work better when you have the right levels in your body. It can take several weeks before you notice improvement.
- You will decrease your chances of a relapse or a hospital stay.
- It can be more difficult to treat your mood symptoms when they are not treated fully and are having frequent relapses.
- Taking the medications regularly helps you to focus on other goals and activities in your life.
- If you don't take the medications as prescribed, your doctor cannot properly consider whether or not they are helping you.

If I have side effects, will they improve?

- Side effects are undesired effects of a medication. Most side effects are temporary and improve as your body adjusts to the medication. Based on your side effects, your doctor may determine you need a reduced dose, an additional medication to lessen the side effect, or a medication change.
- Some side effects are very uncomfortable, but often you must decide whether or not the benefit of the medication outweighs the discomfort of the side effect.
- If you are experiencing any medication side effects, it is important to tell your nurse and health care provider.

Where can I find support and advocacy resources?

- Michigan Medicine Depression Center Toolkit: <http://depressiontoolkit.org/>
- National Alliance on Mental Illness: <https://www.nami.org/>

References

- American Heart Association. *Medications: Myths Versus Facts*. Retrieved from: http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/More/ConsumerHealthCare/Medications-Myths-Versus-Fact_UCM_460784_Article.jsp#.WXitMRXyvcs
- Substance Abuse and mental Health Services Administration. (2010). *Illness Management and Recovery Evidence-Based Practices (EBP) Kit*. Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by Michigan Medicine for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by Michigan Medicine and for which Michigan Medicine does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Author: Leigh Baguley, BSN, RN
Reviewers: Ilze Sturis Hallman, DNP, MS, RN

Patient Education by [Michigan Medicine](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#). Last Revised 01/2018