

For many individuals suffering from a mental health challenge, therapy alone can help transform their outlook and prognosis. However, for others, the introduction of psychiatric medications can be extremely useful in a treatment plan, especially when combined with ongoing therapy. Of course, as with all medications, please ensure you discuss all questions, concerns and dosing information with a prescribing physician.

Medication Basics

What are psychiatric medications?

A psychiatric medication is a psychoactive drug taken to exert an effect on the chemical makeup of the brain and nervous system. These medications are used to treat certain mental health diagnoses. Usually prescribed in psychiatric settings, these medications are typically made of synthetic chemical compounds, although some are naturally occurring, or at least naturally derived. Like all medications, psychiatric medications carry risk for adverse effects. Some adverse effects can be treated symptomatically by using additional medications. It is important to remember that if these medications are discontinued, certain side effects can emerge. Therefore, one should not change the dosage or discontinue the medication without medical guidance.

Who can prescribe psychiatric medications?

While Primary Care Physicians, Physician Assistants and Nurse Practitioners (depending on your state) are often qualified to provide medication, they have not received specialized training in mental health psychiatric medications. Therefore, whenever possible, it is recommended to receive psychiatric medications from a psychiatrist.

The following information is taken from WebMD, www.webmd.com

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Types of Psychiatric Medications

There are five main types of psychotropic medications: antidepressants, anti-anxiety medications, stimulants, antipsychotics, and mood stabilizers.

Antidepressants are used to treat depression

There are many different types of antidepressants. Some types are less frequently used than others but may work for you in consultation with your doctor. The most common antidepressants are:

- Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), which steadily increase the amount of serotonin in your brain. Serotonin is a powerful neurotransmitter that regulates your mood, bowel movements, sleep, blood clotting, and more.
- Selective norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs), which gradually increase the amount of norepinephrine in your brain. Norepinephrine makes you feel awake and alert.
- Bupropion, which promotes important brain activity and can be used to treat seasonal affective disorder (SAD) or to help people quit smoking.

Anti-anxiety medications treat an array of anxiety disorders

These medications can be used to treat panic attacks, phobias, generalized anxiety, and various anxiety-related symptoms. Anti-anxiety medications include beta-blockers that help treat the physical symptoms of anxiety, including increased heartbeat, nausea, sweating, and trembling. Because they typically cause drowsiness, some tranquilizers and sleep medications are also used to treat anxiety and insomnia. These tend to be prescribed for only a short time to prevent dependency.

Stimulants help manage unorganized behavior

They accomplish this by improving concentration and having a calming effect. Stimulants are often prescribed for people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Antipsychotics help manage psychosis

Psychosis describes multiple conditions that affect the mind. They are often indicated by the person becoming separated from their reality and experiencing delusions or hallucinations. Antipsychotics can help people with psychosis think more clearly, feel calmer, sleep better, and communicate more effectively.

Mood stabilizers help regulate extreme emotions.

This doesn't mean they don't let you feel all the good that life has to offer. They simply help you manage your range of emotions. Mood stabilizers are primarily used to treat bipolar disorder and extreme mood swings.

Minimizing Complications

As with any medication, taking extra caution with psychotropic drugs can help prevent unnecessary complications.

- Avoid alcohol and illicit drugs when taking psychotropic medications. Certain combinations can be dangerous.
- Use caution when driving or operating machinery if your medications cause fatigue or drowsiness.
- Women who are pregnant, breast-feeding, or may become pregnant should talk to their doctor about possible complications with their medications.
- Don't suddenly stop taking your medications. This can make you feel ill and cause severe side effects.
- If you experience adverse allergic reactions such as fever, rashes, or similar side effects, contact your doctor as soon as possible.