

Medications to manage anxiety

The medication your provider prescribes depends on a variety of factors including your symptoms and their severity, how you responded to particular treatments in the past, and your personal preference. Your treating practitioner will review treatment options with you and determine a treatment plan that can best address your personal needs.

Medication is one of several tools that can help manage anxiety.

Commonly used medications for treating anxiety

The three most common types of medications used to address anxiety symptoms are anti-anxiety medication, antidepressant medication and beta-blockers.

- **Anti-anxiety medication**—Drugs such as benzodiazepines work quickly to combat anxiety. Commonly prescribed medications of this type include Xanax (alprazolam), Ativan (lorazepam) and Klonopin (clonazepam). Because some people may eventually require higher doses to maintain the same effect, anti-anxiety medications are usually prescribed only for a short time. Side effects include drowsiness, dizziness and slow reaction time.
- **Antidepressant medication**—These drugs relieve symptoms of anxiety by improving how brain cells communicate with one another. Commonly prescribed antidepressants include Prozac (fluoxetine), Paxil (paroxetine)

and Effexor (venlafaxine). Although antidepressants may have side effects, they are usually mild and disappear as you continue to take the medication. Examples of common side effects are upset stomach, headache, jitteriness and sensitivity to light. It can take several weeks to experience optimal effects from antidepressants.

- **Beta blockers**—Typically used to treat heart conditions, beta blockers such as Inderal (propranolol) have been found to help physical symptoms of anxiety, such as sweating, trembling and nausea.

Here are some important things to know about anxiety medications:

- Medications do not cure anxiety. They can help reduce the severity of the symptoms you experience so that you can think more clearly and make decisions about coping with your current situation.
- Several types of medications are used to relieve symptoms of anxiety, and there is no one way to determine which medication



will work best for you. You may have to try different medications to achieve the benefit you want.

Before starting medications

When meeting with your doctor to discuss potential use of medications to treat your anxiety, remember to tell your doctor about:

- Any allergies you have to medications
- All medications you are currently taking
- Which medication(s) worked for you in the past
- If you are pregnant or breast-feeding.

This information is important when your doctor is making decisions about which anxiety medication to prescribe.

Questions to ask

Don't hesitate to ask your doctor about the medication(s) used to treat your anxiety. Some questions you may want to ask are:

- How does the medication work? What is its potential benefit?
- Is there a generic or formulary equivalent? (Your health plan can give you a formulary list that includes covered medications and costs.)
- How and when do I take the medication?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- What are the potential side effects?
- How long will I have to take the medication, and how will I stop taking it?

Cautions needed when taking medications

- Medications are most effective when taken exactly as prescribed by your doctor. If you find yourself needing more and more medication to achieve the same effect, talk to your doctor immediately.
- Do not stop taking your medications without talking with your doctor first. If you and your doctor decide to discontinue your medication, your doctor may recommend a gradual reduction rather than abrupt termination. It is important to follow your doctor's recommendations to avoid discomfort.

Tips for making the best use of medications

- Check with your doctor frequently during the first three months of treatment to address side effects, monitor progress and ask any questions you may have. Monthly or more frequent appointments may be of benefit to you; talk to your doctor about how often he/she advises you to have an appointment.
- If you have problems remembering to take your medication as prescribed, try taking it at the same time you engage in another daily routine activity such as brushing your teeth or eating breakfast. You can also try using a seven-day pill box or writing reminder notes to yourself.
- Keep a log that monitors which of your symptoms have improved, which have not improved, and what side effects you are experiencing. Take the log to your appointments to use when you talk with your doctor.

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