

4) Allergic Skin Rash: An itchy, general rash can occur, even if you haven't been in the sun. This can be an allergy & you should see your doctor quickly - luckily this is very rare.

5) Faintness: Antipsychotic medicine can cause low blood pressure & faintness - but with these injections this is very rare.

6) Weight-gain: Some of these medications can alter metabolism & increase appetite. This can lead to weight-gain if you eat more. This can be managed by getting dietary advice from your doctor, nurse or a dietitian, & by trying to do 20 to 30 minutes of basic exercise each day, such as walking. Try to drink water, diluted juice or diet drinks if you have a dry mouth, not sweet sugary drinks. There's a separate handout on dealing with weight-gain due to medicines.

7) Sexual Difficulties: Occasionally, antipsychotic medicines can contribute to difficulties in sexual performance or feelings. However, there are a lot of other common causes for this as well, eg. stress, anxiety or medical conditions, so it's important to discuss it with your doctor & have it properly checked out. Altering the medicine or dose often help this problem if it occurs.



FOR WOMEN - DURING OR AFTER PREGNANCY:

These medications may sometimes be needed at these times, but obviously special care will be needed if you are pregnant or breast-feeding. Discuss options fully with your doctor.

MIXING THESE MEDICATIONS WITH OTHERS:

This is often possible, but your doctor should advise you, as some combinations do increase side-effects.

While it is hard to get used to having regular medication, especially if it causes some side-effects, it is important to remember that many people are not particularly troubled by these. Possible side-effects have to be balanced against the fact that being ill can be very scary or disruptive to your life, and these medicines allow you to cope, to live in the community or to leave hospital and avoid readmissions. Remember that your doctor and nurse will do all they can to adjust your treatment so as to cut down or stop side-effects, so don't hesitate to discuss these.

INFORMATION ABOUT ANTIPSYCHOTIC MEDICATIONS - DEPOT INJECTIONS

WHAT ARE THESE MEDICATIONS FOR ? They act to treat the type of psychiatric condition called a psychosis, & to prevent this returning, once you have recovered. In a psychosis, there may be strange or unusual experiences, such as seeing or hearing things that other people aren't aware of. You may hear a voice or voices talking, even when alone, for example. Ideas may be rather confused, & beliefs can be held which are later seen to have been mistaken, & not real. It may be hard to think clearly & concentrate. These experiences are due to a psychiatric illness which affects your thinking & senses. This can be a very confusing & scary experience, & your moods can also be unstable. Sometimes you may feel threatened, & that people are against you.



HOW DO THESE MEDICATIONS WORK ?

Antipsychotic medications help these problems fade away, & your thinking to become clear again. They aren't just "tranquillizers", but actually treat all the symptoms mentioned above. In a psychosis, there's an imbalance of some chemicals (called neurotransmitters) in areas of the brain. Two main chemicals like this are called dopamine & serotonin. Antipsychotic medicines act on this chemical imbalance.

HOW ARE THESE MEDICATIONS GIVEN ?

Many are given as tablets or capsules, but if the illness tends to return unless you take some regular medication, it is often easier to have the antipsychotic medication as a longer-acting "depot" injection. The medication is in a special form so it is absorbed very slowly after being injected - to give low but steady levels of medicine in the bloodstream. A very small amount is injected into a large muscle - eg. the back of the hip or upper arm. It may sound scary to have an injection, but it's far less painful than a blood-test, as the skin over the hip or upper arm isn't very sensitive, and the amount injected is very small. It also doesn't have to be done very often: these injections can be spread out to once weekly, fortnightly or monthly, according to the type of medicine. Usually they're given

every 3 or 4 weeks. Having the medication as an injection gives much smoother levels of medicine in a person's system, unlike tablets, which can lead to up and down levels which vary a bit after each dose. It's also a lot less hassle just having an injection occasionally, & avoids the need to remember to take pills regularly. When someone is starting on an injection like this, it is usual to have a small dose first - a 'starter' dose to make sure that the medication suits. The regular injections then start a few days later. People receiving these injections or taking the medicine as tablets often have out-patient follow-up through a mental health community team, & will see a nurse and a doctor on the team regularly, for check-ups and support.

Names of medicines that can be given as long-acting injections:

(The medicine's official name is given first, then the common or "trade" name in brackets):

Haloperidol (Haldol)

Pipothiazine (Piportil)

Risperidone (Consta)

Clopixol (Clopenthixol)

MAY 1997							x Sue coming to give injection	
MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN		
			1 x	2	3	4		
5	6	7	8	9	10	11		
12	13	14	15	16	17	18		
19	20	21	22 x	23	24	25		
26	27	28	29	30	31			

Flupenthixol (Depixol)
Fluphenazine (various trade names)

A nurse from the clinic will give these injections regularly - either at the clinic or through a home visit. Your nurse helps to keep a record of when the medicine is due, and makes appointments to see you at home or at the clinic.

WHAT SORT OF SIDE-EFFECTS CAN HAPPEN ?

There are several possible side-effects. Sometimes they may be quite troublesome, or in other situations just a slight nuisance. If side-effects are quite troublesome it is important to talk to your doctor or nurse. Changing the dose or the type of medication can often help a lot. Doctors and nurses will aim for the lowest possible dose that works for you, to minimise any side-effects.

POSSIBLE SIDE-EFFECTS ARE:

1) Muscular Side-effects: These include stiffness, shakiness or muscle spasms & restlessness of the legs, with a need to keep moving or pacing. There can also be a feeling of inner restlessness.

These are most likely to crop up if you're not used to a medicine or the dose has increased. Consta causes them a bit less. If any of these side-effects occur, a side-effect medicine to treat these problems may be needed for a while. There are several side-effect medicines which help these problems. Examples are: *Benztropine (Cogentin)*, *Procyclidine (Kemadrin)*, *Orphenadrine (Disipal)*, and *pranoloalol*.



While these side-effects may sound unpleasant, they don't always occur, and are eased a lot by the side-effect medications. Also, they settle as you get used to the medication. It's important to get help from a nurse or doctor if you're having side-effects, so that something can be done.

In some people who have had these medications for quite some time (usually several years), muscle movements around the face or neck called can build up slowly. This is called tardive dyskinesia (or "TD") & is a little like a facial tic. Your psychiatrist & nurse are trained to check for this, and would talk to you about treatment options if they did notice early signs. Options might include lowering the dose or changing the medicine. Early TD will gradually settle if the medicine causing it can be stopped or reduced.

2) Dry Mouth, Blurred Vision & Constipation: These can sometimes occur. Again, these side-effects settle down as you get used to the medicine. You may need to eat more fibre and fruit, or take a laxative, to avoid constipation. Dry mouth isn't common one you're used to the medicine & the blurry vision doesn't mean the eyes are harmed at all. There's no need to get new glasses as it's a temporary focussing problem - it settles as you get used to the medicine or when the dose is reduced. Some people find that using a cheap pair of reading glasses helps, until the focussing improves. Driving will need to be postponed, if vision is blurred.

3) Drowsiness: This goes away as you get used to the medicine, and isn't usually a problem once the dose is adjusted to be right for you. If it's a problem, talk to your doctor or nurse.