

PSYCHOTROPIC MEDICATIONS

Guide for youth in Oregon foster care



Questions to ask before consenting to a new medication

- What is my diagnosis?
- What is the name of the medication you recommend?
- Are there any alternatives to taking this medication?
- How much do I have to take and how often?
- How long will I have to take it?
- When will it start working?
- How will I know it is working?
- What are the side effects?
- What side effects do people my age most commonly experience?
- Will the medication make me gain weight? What can I do to keep my weight under control?
- What do I do if a problem develops? (I get sick, miss a dose or I get side effects.)
- How often should I see the doctor (or other person) who prescribed the medication?
- Are there foods I should avoid while on this medication?
- Are there special things I should or shouldn't do while taking it?
- What would happen if I used alcohol or street drugs with this medication?

THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW...

What are psychotropic medications?

Psychotropic medication (pronounced “sike-oh-trope-ick”) medications affect a person’s mind, emotions, moods, and behaviors. These medicines are used to help people with thoughts, feelings, and emotions that are getting in the way of day to day life, and to help a person feel better.

Sometimes your thoughts, emotions or behaviors get in the way of doing things you want to do. Maybe you’re not able to sleep at night or do your homework or have fun with friends. One option that can make you feel better is psychotropic medication. Doctors and nurse practitioners prescribe these medications to reduce symptoms such as anxiety, difficulty paying attention, depression and racing thoughts, if other things like talk therapy, or exercise are not helpful. These medications can have many benefits. They also can cause negative side effects and can be harmful if not used correctly.

What is informed consent?

Consent means to give permission for something to happen. *Informed consent* means a doctor gives you specific information about the risks and benefits of a medication or treatment before permission is given for the medication to be used. Make sure you have all of the information you need to decide if these medications are a good option for you. Because you are in foster care, the law says your caseworker also has to give consent for you to start any new psychotropic medication.

What are my options?

Your doctor or mental health specialist may discuss several options with you including:

- Treatment options other than medication
- Psychotropic medication for temporary or long-term use
- A combination of both of the above.

Options other than medication:

Counseling/therapy — You may want to talk to a trained therapist who can listen and offer guidance to help you learn useful ways to deal with your feelings.

Exercise — Exercise releases endorphins, or “feel-good” chemicals, in your brain. These chemicals make you feel less sad or anxious. Being active can take your mind off of your problems and help you deal with things.

Diet — What you eat may affect your moods and energy levels. You may feel better eating less “bad carbs”, including foods with lots of sugar or white flour (muffins, bread, bagels). Research tells us to eat foods rich in omega-3 fats, which can be found in nuts and certain fish (tuna, salmon). Vitamins and minerals also can help your brain and body work better. Before taking vitamin supplements or making changes in your diet, talk with your doctor.

Other activities — There may be other ways to help you feel better too. Activities such as keeping a journal, dancing, playing music, painting or other art, and writing poetry have been found to be helpful. Martial arts, meditation or taking care of animals may also help.

TAKING YOUR MEDICATION SAFELY

To increase the benefits and reduce the risks of using psychotropic medication, you need to be an active member of your health-care team. **It is important to:**

Ask questions. Talk with your doctor, nurse practitioner, pharmacist or other health-care providers about your medications. Know what each medication is for, how to take it, what kinds of side effects to expect and how to reduce the side effects. **Follow the directions on the label.** Take the medication exactly as prescribed.

Learn what things don't mix well with your medication. Some medicines, foods and drinks should not be taken together. When mixed, they may reduce the positive effects of your medication or cause harmful effects. For example, drinking alcohol while taking medication can slow your reactions, and make driving a car dangerous. Some herbs and supplements can interact with prescription medications in unsafe ways. Also, some medical conditions (such as high blood pressure) and other medications can cause unwanted reactions with psychotropic medications. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist and read the labels to learn more about what you should avoid when taking your medication.

Keep records. Make an up-to-date list — on paper or your phone — of ALL medicines (prescription and over-the-counter) that you take, and include vitamins, herbs and other supplements. Make notes on how each medication makes you feel, any side effects, or changes over time.

Follow up with your provider regularly. While you are taking your medication, your health care provider should follow up with you, listen to your concerns and monitor your progress.

Don't share your meds!

Your psychotropic medication is intended to be used by you and only you. Giving your medication to someone else could result in serious side effects and even death.

What if I want to stop treatment?

Always talk with your health care provider if you are thinking about stopping your medicine. You, your provider, foster parent and caseworker should make this very important decision together.

When you suddenly stop taking certain medications, you may experience uncomfortable or harmful side effects. These medicines have to be decreased slowly over several weeks.

When you and your provider agree that it is time to stop a medication, it is very important that you follow your instructions about how to do this.

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Children's Bureau et al. (2012). Making healthy choices: A guide on psychotropic medications for youth in foster care. Washington, DC: Author.

For more information and resources about psychotropic medications visit the **DHS Psychotropic Medication website** at <http://tinyurl.com/dhsmeds>

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