In addition to psychotherapy and support groups, prescribed medications play an important role in treating mental illnesses. They help in reducing symptoms and maintain daily tasks. In order to get the most out of the medications, patients should make an informed choice about taking medications and understand the benefits and the costs associated with medications use. All medications should be prescribed by mental health professional because only your mental health provider can determine which medication is the right one for you.

**Remember**

* Medications can take 4-6 weeks to become fully effective.
* If one drug is not working, do not worry because there are many others to use.
* A combination of medications can be used for better outcomes.
* Side effects vary from person to person depending on his/ her mental health condition and disorder.
* You can improve your body’s adjustment and response to the medications by following a healthy life style.

**Understanding your medications and making a decision**

When you discuss your concerns and learn and understand your option, you are more likely to come up with plans that can work better for you. The following tips can help you decide make a choice about the medications:

* Get information about how certain medications can help you feel and be better by asking your mental health provider or doctor.
* Find out what the side effects are.
* Think about if you really need the medications. If not, it is fine to live with few symptoms because living with some symptoms is sometimes better than the medications’ side effects.
* Do not stop taking any medications unless your doctor tells you.

**Things you should do before taking any medications**

* Tell your doctor about any current medication or vitamin you are taking.
* Tell your doctor about any drug and alcohol consumption.
* Let your doctor know if you have any allergies.
* Understand how to take the medications as prescribed.
* Get your doctor contact number to call him for emergencies or to report any weird side effects.

**Types of medications used in treating mental illnesses**

**Antidepressants** are medications usually used to treat depression, and they can help in minimizing symptoms and altering the mood. They are also used for other condition like anxiety, pain, and insomnia.

The most common type of antidepressants used are Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) AND Serotonin and Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRIs).

 SSRIs include: SNRIs include:

* Fluoxetine Venlafaxine
* Citalopram Duloxetine
* Sertraline
* Paroxetine
* Escitalopram

Common Antidepressants’ side effects are:

* Diarrhea
* Sleepiness
* Weight gain
* Nausea and vomiting

S **Anti- Anxiety medications** are used to help with anxiety, and they can reduce its symptoms like the extreme worry, fear, and pain attacks.

The most common anti- anxiety medications used are Benzodiazepines that include:

* Clonazepam
* Alprazolam
* Lorazepam

For chronic anxiety, Buspirone is used instead.

Common anti- anxiety medications’ side effects are:

* Nausea and vomiting
* Headache
* Tiredness
* Blurred vision
* Nightmares
* Confusion

Buspirone’s side effects are:

* Dizziness
* Nervousness
* Headache
* Excitement
* Trouble sleeping

**Mood stabilizers** help reduce extremes of high and low moods and other related symptoms. They are also used to treat depression that last for long time or the one that comes and goes every while.

Lithium and Anticonvulsant are common mood stabilizers.

Anticonvulsants include:

* Carbamazepine
* Lamotrigine
* Oxcarbazepine

Common mood stabilizers’ side effects are:

* Itching, rash
* Excessive thirst
* Frequent urination
* Shaking of hands
* Fast or slow heart beats
* Changes in vision
* Hallucination
* Swelling of the hands, feel, face, eyes, and lips
* Nausea and vomiting
* Sexual problems

**Antipsychotic** are medications used to manage conditions that affect the mind. For example, symptoms like hearing unwanted voices or having fearful thoughts. They help the patients to think clearly, to stay focused on reality, and to feel organized and calm.

This type of medications come in pill form in combination with other, and examples of antipsychotic medications are:

 Old or first generation used second generation used

* Haloperidol Risperidone
* Perphenazine Olanzapine
* Fluphenazine Quetiapine
* Chlorpromazine Ziprasidone

 Aripiprazole

Antipsychotic medications’ side effects are:

* Drowsiness
* Dizziness
* Restlessness
* Weight gain
* Dry mouth
* Constipation
* Nausea and vomiting
* Low blood pressure
* A low number of white blood cells
* Uncontrolled movement
* Blurred vision

**Dealing with side effects**

* Try sugarless or mints for dry mouth.
* Drink plenty of water and eat a lot of fruit and vegetable for constipation.
* Take your medication with meal to avoid nausea and vomiting.
* Talk with your doctor to change the medication or to change the doses for feeling sleepy or having sexual problems.

**Stopping your medications**

It is recommended not to stop your medication until your doctor tells you to do so. However, the stigma, the cost of the medication, and the side effects lead a lot of people to stop the medications without even asking their doctor. This is a big step to take especially when your symptoms are out of your control. Stopping your medications can affect your health negatively.

**Before stopping your medication, do these things**

* Talk with your doctor or mental health provider. You are the person who make the decision about your situation, but hearing their advice really matter.
* Talk with your family and people who support you. Also, make sure to talk with people in your support group if you have one.
* Think about your situation and life after medication. Ask yourself if you can achieve your goals and continue living normally without any type of medications. If you can, go for it.

**Medication use and family support**

Family attitude can definitely affect the patient’s willing to take the prescribed medication. It is very important for the family to help their loved one to keep taking his/ her medication and support him/ her to recover. When any of the family members has any concern about the prescribed medication’s efficiency, it is better to include them in the educational process. Mental health providers are responsible for educating those concerned family members about the prescribed medication.

**Medication tapering and discontinuation**

The effect of medications for mental health disorders can take several days to several weeks to take a place, and it can take several months for their full effect. Once the mental health disorder is stabilized over a period of months, the medications should be continued for approximately six months. Patients with mood an anxiety disorders may consider tapering and discontinuing medications depend on how bad their symptoms are. Patients with bipolar and psychotic disorders are preferred to stay on medication for longer period oftime.

**Always check with your scleroderma medical team before starting any new medications.**

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