

Drugs for Atypical Antipsychotics



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What are atypical antipsychotics?

Atypical antipsychotics are different from conventional antipsychotics, mainly in diminished incidence of “extrapyramidal side effects” (EPS) such as tremor, muscle stiffness, restlessness and lack of muscle coordination. Except Clozapine, there is no significant difference in terms of efficacy between conventional and atypical antipsychotics.

What is Clozapine?

Clozapine is mainly indicated for Schizophrenia. When comparing with conventional antipsychotics, the incidence of EPS is less, and also it is particularly effective to a group of patients who are resistant to other antipsychotics. Clozapine is effective for about 30-60% of these types of patients, thereby improving their quality of life, also reducing pain and suffering to their family.

What are the side-effects of Clozapine?

Side effects include agranulocytosis, fatigue, somnolence, hypersalivation, rapid heartbeat, constipation, dizziness, weight gain, urinary incontinence and chest infection (myocarditis).

Nevertheless, less than 1% of patients on Clozapine develop agranulocytosis. For the best interests of patients, they are required to take a blood test every week for the initial 18 weeks regimen, subsequently once every month as the blood test shows “white blood cell” count to ensure the patient’s immune system is not compromised.

What are the side effects of other atypical antipsychotics?

Although the side effects of atypical antipsychotics are less, EPS and metabolic side effects are still probable. And it may also increase the risk of developing diabetes, and other side effects such as fatigue, somnolence, dizziness, hypotension, constipation, dry mouth and ECG changes, etc.

Even though there is no evidence showing atypical antipsychotics to be teratogenic, special precaution should be exercised for patients who are pregnant or in preparation. Base on insufficient data and evidence, patients should consult their doctor if they become pregnant or intend to become pregnant during therapy.

Clinical Applications

In conclusion, atypical antipsychotics may show improvement over the conventional ones by attenuating the side effects. However, considering the safety and side effects of Clozapine, it is primarily reserved for use in treatment-resistant cases only.

Frequently Asked Questions

May I stop taking my medicine?

It is necessary to take your medicine promptly in order to control your illness. According to scientific research, the rates of relapse increase drastically if one is not taking their medications. If you disregard your condition, your chance of recovery would be lessened.

What to do before taking my medication?

Before taking your medication, you must always ensure whether the medicine belongs to you, always follow your doctor's instructions, and those on the pharmacy label. You should never change the prescribed dosage or stop your medication without your doctor's direction. And never take two doses at the same time if you forget to take a dose.

How to deal with side effects?

Talk to your doctor if you experience any side effects. Your doctor may adjust the dosage in order to minimize the adverse effects. Do not stop taking your medicine without your doctor's direction.

How long do I need to take my medicine?

The duration of therapy varies according to the types and severities of illness. Generally speaking, patients with schizophrenia, particularly those with a history of relapse, need to take their medications for a longer period of time. But if your condition is stable, your doctor may adjust the dosage to the minimal-effective dose to control your illness. What should the care-givers do if patients refuse to take their medications? Do not criticize the patients. Try to find out the underlying reason for their refusal e.g. if the patients experience any undesirable side effects or have any necessary concern about their medications, etc. Encouragement from the family and comprehensive explanation of their drug treatment is crucial. Contact the healthcare professionals if the patients still refuse to take the medications

What should the care-givers do if patients refuse to take their medications?

Do not criticize the patients. Try to find out the underlying reason for their refusal e.g. if the patients experience any undesirable side effects or have any necessary worry about their medications, etc. Encouragement from the family and comprehensive explanation of their drug treatment is crucial. Contact the healthcare professionals if the patients still refuse to take the medications.

DO

1. Strictly follow the doctor's instructions
2. Pay attention to the drug name, dosage and frequency, etc. before taking your medication
3. Read the prescription label carefully
4. Pay attention to the dosage, indication, contraindication and side effects
5. Understand the method of administration
6. Store your medication properly
7. Complete the prescribed course unless otherwise directed
8. If you have any questions, talk to your family and ask your health care professionals

DON'Ts

1. Change the dosage of your medication on your own
2. Stop taking your medication except on your doctor's advice.
3. Drink alcohol with your medication.
4. Put your medication in other bottle.
5. Take other medication unless directed by your doctor.
6. Lie to your doctors about your compliance