

# Key facts and information about Medication and mental illness





# Medication: facts & mental health

Medication is a very individual matter. Some take medication for their mental health while some prefer other methods of help, such as talking therapy. Those diagnosed with a mental illness often find that a *combination* of medication and talking therapy works best.

**This page aims to provide an informative introduction to medication for mental health: why and when should people take it, how does it work, and what is it like?**

## Why medication?

There are many different reasons for taking medication.

**Your GP and/or psychiatrist will help you decide whether taking medication is necessary.**

Here are some of the reasons behind decisions:

1. Symptoms of mental illness often indicate that some chemicals in your brain are no longer working properly and you need medication to restore the balance.
2. If you have been unwell for some time and you don't seem to be getting better, medication might be more effective if not necessary. For example, if you have been continuously depressed, have trouble sleeping, are very low on energy and/or find it impossible to do your daily tasks.
3. In some occasions medication may be necessary to stabilise you in order to enable you to participate in talking therapy. For example, if you are unable to get out of bed or if severe depression is easily triggered when a difficult topic is brought up, it may be difficult for you to make progress in talking therapy.

## Stigma

Stigma surrounding taking medication for mental illnesses is largely unaddressed. This has several main consequences: (1) sufferers are less likely to *seek* effective medical treatment which may lead to a worsening of the health condition; (2) patients are much less likely to *adhere to* prescribed regimens; (3) *self-stigmatisation* is reinforced, deepening the effects of (1) and (2).

## Prescriptions

**You should only take medicine prescribed to you.**

**Your GP** can prescribe antidepressants without consulting a psychiatrist.

Medication such as mood stabilisers or antipsychotics require a **psychiatrist** to assess you, who will then let your GP know which medication, if any, to prescribe.

**Each individual drug can have two kinds of names:**

**A generic name** – this is the drug's medical name.

**A trade name** – this is a name that may be given by the company that makes the drug.

A drug only has one generic name – but it might also have several different trade names if more than one company makes it. For example, the antidepressant *fluoxetine* (generic name) can also be referred to as trade names *Prozac*, *Prozep* and *Oxactin*. If your prescription has suddenly changed or if you are concerned about your prescription, consult your doctor.

## Side effects

**Most medication, regardless of what it's for, has side effects.** Everybody is different; each person can react differently to the same medication. Talk about your concerns regarding side effects with your doctor.

Most side effects wear off after 2-4 few weeks; it is important that you don't quit the medication suddenly as this is likely to make you feel worse.

**Remember it can take time to find a medicine that's right for you.**



# Medication: advice

## Ask/tell your GP

You always have the right to **voice your concerns** and ask your GP any questions that you might have. **Some useful questions to ask if you are thinking about taking medication might be:**

1. Why you are being prescribed the medication, directions of use, length of use, and importantly: how it is supposed to help you.
2. About the possible side effects you may have when starting your medication.
3. How long the medication will take to work. Most medication takes at least 2 weeks or longer to *begin* working.
4. Any other questions you have no matter how “silly” about the medication.

It will be useful to tell your doctor about all medications and supplements you’re already taking. Remind them about any allergies or problems you have had with medicines in the past.

## Get answers online

It is always a good idea to do your own research alongside your doctor’s advice, especially if you are thinking about seeking medical treatment. For more information about making choices and managing problems related to medication, visit **Rethink’s help page:**

<https://www.rethink.org/diagnosis-treatment/medications>

Or visit the **official NHS page** on antidepressant drugs here:

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/antidepressant-drugs>

The charity **Mind** also has great help pages:

<http://www.mind.org.uk/>

## Your choice

**In most cases it is your choice whether or not you want to accept the clinical recommendation.** If you're offered medication, you usually have the right to refuse it and to ask for an alternative treatment.

## Exceptions

There are some **special circumstances** where you *might* be required by law to take medication:

1. If you have been admitted to hospital under the Mental Health Act (sometimes called being sectioned).
2. If you have been discharged from hospital under certain sections of the Mental Health Act, and are being treated on a community treatment order (CTO).

If you are in a situation like this, search for information on consent to treatment for guidance on what steps you can take to challenge the decision.

## Preparing for a crisis

If you are worried that you might be forced to take medication if you become very unwell in the future, while you're feeling well enough you could write a **crisis plan** or advance statement.

**In a crisis plan you can explain:**

- Which drugs have and haven’t helped you in the past.
- What you would like to happen, or not to happen, if you become very unwell.

This hand-out should not replace the diagnosis, help, advice or treatment of a healthcare professional. If you are worried about your health, you should consult your doctor.

This hand-out is part of Mental Illness Awareness Week, an informative series of talks about mental illness brought to you by **Mind Your Head**. For more information visit our website: [www.mindyourheadyork.org](http://www.mindyourheadyork.org).