

Medications for Your Mental Health

Mental illness, not unlike physical illness, can affect you or your loved ones quality of life if left untreated. As with treating most medical illnesses, mental illness can also be successfully treated and is a part of taking care of your overall health. People understand they cannot treat diabetes or a lump in their breast on their own, but that same understanding often does not extend to mental illness. You will not have a healthy body if you do not take care of your mind.

If you or a loved one is struggling with symptoms of: persistent sadness, anxiety, experiencing unwanted, frightening, obsessive or ruminating thoughts, are hearing voices, have lost the ability to perform self-care, have an eating disorder, have addictive behaviors or thoughts of self-harm, are unable to regulate your emotions or behaviors, you may be exhibiting symptoms of a mental illness. There is a wide range of mental illnesses and they have their own specific pattern of symptoms and can vary in severity. Chances are, in order to improve your mental health, you may need to seek professional help and may also require a prescribed medication to help reduce or alleviate your symptoms.

Medications can play a very important part in the treatment of mental illness and are often the most helpful when they're a part of an overall treatment program that may include Psychotherapy, Rehabilitative and/or Community Services. Psychiatric medications work by regulating the brain chemicals, as it is believed that symptoms of mental illness come from these chemical imbalances in the brain. A person may need to take medication (s) for a short period of time or may require long term or a life time of treatment. Some medications may work better for one person than for another. It is often difficult to predict who will respond to what medication, but prescribers usually will review your clinical records and gather a family and medical history in determining one medication over another. Some psychiatric medications tend to work very quickly, while others may work slowly and you may need to be on a medication for several weeks before you see any improvement.

Medications for mental illness fall into the following categories:

Antidepressants -Work to improve symptoms of sadness, depressed mood and anxiety and thoughts of self-harm. Medications for depression impact the brain chemicals associated with emotion, such as serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine.

Antipsychotics- May reduce or eliminate symptoms of psychosis such as hearing unwanted voices or having fearful thoughts. These medications can help you have clear thoughts, stay organized and calm. Antipsychotic medications impact the brain chemical called dopamine. Antipsychotics may also be used to treat depression as they work on the brain differently than antidepressants and may help those who have not been relieved by other treatments.

Mood Stabilizers- Reduce extreme mood swings and have been proven effective in treating Bipolar Disorder. Mood stabilizers can also be used to treat depression.

Anti-Anxiety- Reduce the physical and emotional symptoms of anxiety, can help with social phobias and panic attacks and can aid with insomnia and help to make you feel more relaxed.

Stimulants and related medication- Can be helpful in reducing the symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorders such as hyperactivity and impulsiveness and may improve concentration and attention spans.

Before starting a medication:

- Talk with your prescriber and be honest about all the symptoms you have been experiencing.
- Tell your prescriber about any and all drugs, alcohol, herbal supplements, over the counter or other prescription medications you are or have been taking.
- Discuss your concerns and ask about your options to create a plan that works well for you.
- Ask about the potential benefits, as well as potential side effects, and ask whom you should contact should you experience unpleasant side effects.
- Be persistent until you find the medication or combination of medications that work for you.
- Work with your prescriber if you wish to discontinue your medication as stopping abruptly can often lead to unpleasant side effects or withdrawal symptoms.
- Take your medication as prescribed even if your symptoms improve unless your physician discontinues them.

Work with your prescriber so you can decide which medication may be best for you. Remember it is very important to treat your mental health as a part of your overall health. Your mental health affects your physical, emotional, social and spiritual well-being. Managing your mental health can lead to better quality of life and no one's illness affects only the individual, but can affect your loved ones, your job and other aspects of your life. Take care of yourself!

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