



Using *Traditional Antipsychotics* in Children and Adolescents

This information explains how **traditional antipsychotics** can be used as part of a treatment plan with children and adolescents. You may wish to share this information with your family members to help them to understand your treatment options. Since every person's needs are different, it is important that you follow the advice provided to you by your own doctor, nurse and/or pharmacist and speak to them if you have any questions about this medication.



What are traditional antipsychotics used for?

Traditional antipsychotics are medications used to treat several medical and psychiatric conditions such as:

- Schizophrenia and other thought disorders
- Mania associated with Bipolar Disorder
- Tic disorders such as Tourette Syndrome
- Pervasive Developmental Disorders' (like Autism and Asperger's Syndrome)

There are many different traditional antipsychotics that can be prescribed in Canada. Some examples of these medications include: chlorpromazine (Largactil[®]), haloperidol (Haldol[®], Haldol LA[®]), pimozide (Orap[®]), loxapine (Loxapac[®]), and zuclopenthixol (Clopixol[®]).

The name of the antipsychotic your doctor recommends is called: _____

These medications may also be used to help treat symptoms associated with other disorders such as some types of anxiety disorders as well as some sleep disorders. They can be used as short term sedatives and to help with impulsive or aggressive behaviours.

Your doctor may be using this medication for another reason. If you are unclear why this medication is being prescribed, please ask the doctor.



How do traditional antipsychotics work?

Traditional antipsychotics adjust the functioning of certain chemicals in the brain like dopamine. It is believed that some chemicals, like dopamine, are imbalanced in people with disorders like Schizophrenia. The exact way that antipsychotics improve the symptoms of Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder is not fully known.

How should traditional antipsychotics be taken?

Depending on the medication prescribed, it can be taken once or several times a day with or without food. These medications should be taken as directed by your doctor. Try to connect it with something you do each day (like eating breakfast or brushing your teeth) so that you don't forget. Usually, your doctor will start with a low dose and gradually increase the dose over several days or weeks based on how you respond to it.

These medications are available as tablets, liquids, fast-acting injections (to help control symptoms quickly) and long-acting (depot) injections (that can be given by a nurse every 1 – 4 weeks). These long-acting medications are good options if you do not like to take medications on a daily basis or if you have difficulty swallowing medications.

When will this medication start working?

This depends on what you are using it for. When treating the symptoms of Schizophrenia (such as hallucinations or delusions), it usually takes 3 to 6 weeks or longer before the benefits of these medications are noticeable. When this medicine is working, you may notice that your thoughts are clearer and more organized. Agitations may be decreased and hallucinations (for example, hearing voices, or seeing things no one else sees) may stop completely or be much less. Your mood is more settled and you may see a reduction of intense fears and worries.

Please continue taking this medication regularly, even if you are feeling well, as it can prevent symptoms from re-occurring. If you are taking this medication to help with symptoms of “mania” or sleep, you may notice some changes in the first week or two.

These medications do not work in everyone. If you are not feeling better within 6 weeks, your doctor may recommend you try a different medication.



How long do I have to take this medication?

This depends on the symptoms you have, how frequent they occur and how long you have had them. Most people with Schizophrenia or Tic Disorders need to take this medication for several months. This allows time for your symptoms to stabilize and for you to regain your functioning. Your doctor will discuss the benefits and risks to taking this medication with you. At this time, you can also discuss how long you might need to take this medication.

Do not stop taking this medication without discussing it with your doctor. If you stop taking it suddenly, it is possible that your symptoms will return.

Are traditional antipsychotics addictive?

No, these medications are not addictive and you will not have “cravings” for these medications like you might with nicotine or street drugs. If you and your doctor decide it is best to stop, your doctor will explain how to safely come off this medication so you don’t feel negative effects as your body adjusts to being without it.

What are the side effects of this medication and what should I do if I get them?

As with most medications, side effects can occur in those who take traditional antipsychotics. Most side effects are temporary. Sometimes the side effects occur before any of the beneficial effects. It is also possible to experience a side effect that you feel is serious or long lasting. If this occurs, speak to your doctor about ways to manage the side effects at your next appointment. Here are some of the more common side effects of taking traditional antipsychotics. In brackets are suggested ways to lessen these effects.

Common side effects

Should any of these side effects be too troublesome for you, please discuss them with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

- Agitation and feelings of restlessness (*avoid caffeine, from colas and coffee*)
- Blurred vision (*usually disappears in 1-2 weeks; may need to use bright lights when reading or a magnifying glass*)
- Constipation (*increase exercise, fluids, fruits and fibre*)
- Dizziness (*try getting up slowly from a sitting or lying down position*)
- Drowsiness (*try taking the dose at bedtime*)
- Dry mouth (*try chewing sugarless gum, sour candies, ice chips, or popsicles*)
- Headache (*try using a pain reliever like acetaminophen*)
- Increase in hunger (*avoid high calorie foods*)
- Muscle spasms or stiff muscles (*can take a medication to relieve this*)
- Stomach ache (*try taking the medication with food*)

Uncommon side effects (e.g., those that occur in less than 5% of patients)

Contact your doctor IMMEDIATELY if you have any of these side effects:

- Breast tenderness
- Fast or irregular heart beat
- Fever
- Confusion
- Skin rash



Traditional antipsychotic medications have also been associated with a side effect called “tardive dyskinesia”. This is an irreversible adverse effect that can occur in patients who take antipsychotics for several years. It involves involuntary movements of some muscles in the body like the lips, tongue, hands and neck. Withdrawing the antipsychotic early (at the first signs of it occurring) or switching to an “atypical antipsychotic” decreases the chance that this side effect will continue.

What precautions should my doctor and I be aware of when taking this medication?

Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you:

- have any allergies or have had bad reactions to other medications.
- are (or start) taking any other prescription or non-prescription medications. Several medications can interact with traditional antipsychotics. Your doctor may need to change the doses of your medications or monitor you carefully for side effects if you are taking other medications.
- have a history of heart disease, seizures, kidney or liver disease, a bowel obstruction, diabetes (or a family history of diabetes) or glaucoma.
- are pregnant (or are planning to become pregnant) or are breast-feeding.
- are currently using alcohol or street drugs as these substances can decrease how well this medication works for you and/or may make you feel drowsy.



Tip: When taking this medication, your body may have difficulty regulating your temperature. You need to drink lots of fluids and water to avoid becoming dehydrated. You should avoid doing lots of physical activities on hot days.

Tip: Traditional antipsychotics can make some individuals feel drowsy, dizzy or slowed down. If you experience these temporary side effects, it is important to avoid operating heavy machinery or driving a car.



What special instructions should I follow while using this medication?

- Keep all appointments with your doctor. Your doctor may order certain lab tests (like glucose levels, or liver tests) to check how you/your child is responding.
- Do not allow anyone else to use your medication.
- Try to keep a healthy and well balanced diet.
- You may be more sensitive to the sun than usual. Use sunscreen and sunglasses when you first begin to use this medication

Tip: Use the Antipsychotic Monitoring Form for Children and Adolescents to help measure your progress on this medication

What should I do if I forget to take a dose?

If you take this medication only at bedtime and you forget to take it, skip the missed dose and continue with your schedule the next day. Do NOT double your next dose. If you take it more than once a day, take the missed dose as soon as possible. However, if it is almost time for your next dose (e.g., within 4 hours), do not take the missed dose or double up on next dose. Instead, continue your regular dosing schedule.



What storage conditions are needed for this medication?

- Keep this medication in the original container, stored at room temperature away from moisture and heat (e.g., not in the bathroom).
- Keep this medication out of reach from children.