

Psych Meds 101

A Practical Guide to Psychiatric Medication

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Understanding psychiatric medication can be overwhelming, but knowing your options and how to advocate for yourself makes a huge difference.

This guide is broken down into four sections:

Disclaimer

This guide is for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always consult a doctor, psychiatrist, or healthcare provider before making any changes to your medication or treatment plan. If you experience severe side effects, worsening symptoms, or a medical emergency, seek immediate help from a healthcare professional or call 911 (or local emergency services).

Types of medications & their uses

Common side effects & how to manage them

How to talk to your doctor & self-advocate

FAQs



Section 1: Types of medications & their uses

Please note that these lists are not exhaustive, and dosages may vary based on individual factors. Always consult with a healthcare professional before starting or adjusting any medication.

Types of Psychiatric Medications

This table breaks down the five main types of psychiatric medications, including their uses, common examples, and key considerations. It's a quick reference to help understand how these medications work and what to expect.

Category	Antidepressants	Mood Stabilizers	Antipsychotics	Anxiolytics (Anti-Anxiety Meds)	Stimulants & ADHD Meds
Used For	Depression, Anxiety, OCD, PTSD	Bipolar Disorder, Mood Swings	Schizophrenia, Bipolar Disorder, Severe Depression, Psychosis	Anxiety, Panic Attacks, Sleep Disorders	ADHD, Narcolepsy
Common Medications	Prozac, Zoloft, Wellbutrin, Cymbalta	Lithium, Lamictal, Depakote	Seroquel, Abilify, Latuda, Haldol	Xanax, Klonopin, Buspar	Adderall, Ritalin, Vyvanse
Key Notes	Takes 4-6 weeks to work, withdrawal possible if stopped suddenly	Lithium requires blood tests, Lamictal must be started slowly	Some cause weight changes, drowsiness, can take weeks to work	Benzos work fast but can be addictive, Buspar is long-term	Can affect appetite & sleep, some last all day (extended-release)

List of Common Antidepressants and Dosages

Medication Name	Alternative Names	Common Dosage
Amitriptyline	Elavil	50–150 mg daily
Bupropion	Wellbutrin, Zyban	150–300 mg daily
Citalopram	Celexa	20–40 mg daily
Clomipramine	Anafranil	100–250 mg daily
Desvenlafaxine	Pristiq	50–100 mg daily
Duloxetine	Cymbalta	30–120 mg daily
Escitalopram	Lexapro	10–20 mg daily
Fluoxetine	Prozac	20–80 mg daily
Mirtazapine	Remeron	15–45 mg daily
Nortriptyline	Pamelor	25–150 mg daily
Paroxetine	Paxil	20–50 mg daily
Sertraline	Zoloft	50–200 mg daily
Venlafaxine	Effexor XR	75–225 mg daily
Vilazodone	Viibryd	10–40 mg daily
Vortioxetine	Trintellix	5–20 mg daily

List of Common Antipsychotics and Dosages

Medication Name	Alternative Names	Common Dosage
Aripiprazole	Abilify	10–30 mg daily
Asenapine	Saphris	5–10 mg twice daily
Brexpiprazole	Rexulti	1–4 mg daily
Cariprazine	Vraylar	1.5–6 mg daily
Chlorpromazine	Thorazine	100–800 mg daily
Clozapine	Clozaril	200–600 mg daily
Haloperidol	Haldol	1–15 mg daily
Iloperidone	Fanapt	12–24 mg daily
Lurasidone	Latuda	40–160 mg daily
Olanzapine	Zyprexa	5–20 mg daily
Paliperidone	Invega	3–12 mg daily
Quetiapine	Seroquel	150–800 mg daily
Risperidone	Risperdal	1–6 mg daily
Ziprasidone	Geodon	40–160 mg daily

List of Common Mood Stabilizers and Dosages

Medication Name	Alternative Names	Common Dosage
Carbamazepine	Tegretol	400–1,200 mg daily
Divalproex Sodium	Depakote	750–1,500 mg daily
Gabapentin	Neurontin	900–1,800 mg daily
Lamotrigine	Lamictal	25–200 mg daily
Lithium	Lithobid, Eskalith	900–1,200 mg daily
Oxcarbazepine	Trileptal	600–2,400 mg daily
Topiramate	Topamax	50–400 mg daily
Valproate	Depakote	750–1,500 mg daily

List of Common Anxiolytics and Dosages

Medication Name	Alternative Names	Common Dosage
Alprazolam	Xanax	0.25–4 mg daily
Buspirone	Buspar	15–60 mg daily
Clonazepam	Klonopin	0.5–4 mg daily
Diazepam	Valium	2–10 mg daily
Gabapentin	Neurontin	900–1,800 mg daily
Hydroxyzine	Vistaril, Atarax	25–100 mg daily
Lorazepam	Ativan	1–4 mg daily

List of Common Stimulants/ADHD Meds and Dosages

Medication Name	Alternative Names	Common Dosage
Amphetamine/Dextroamphetamine	Adderall	5–40 mg daily
Armodafinil	Nuvigil	150–250 mg daily
Atomoxetine	Strattera	40–100 mg daily
Dexmethylphenidate	Focalin	5–20 mg daily
Dextroamphetamine	Dexedrine	5–40 mg daily
Lisdexamfetamine	Vyvanse	30–70 mg daily
Methylphenidate	Ritalin, Concerta	10–60 mg daily
Modafinil	Provigil	100–400 mg daily

List of Common Sleep Aids and Dosages

Medication Name	Alternative Names	Common Dosage
Doxepin	Silenor	3–6 mg at bedtime
Eszopiclone	Lunesta	1–3 mg at bedtime
Ramelteon	Rozerem	8 mg at bedtime
Suvorexant	Belsomra	10–20 mg at bedtime
Temazepam	Restoril	15–30 mg at bedtime
Trazodone	Desyrel	25–100 mg at bedtime
Zolpidem	Ambien	5–10 mg at bedtime



Section 2: Common side effects & how to manage them

What are Medication Side Effects?

While all psychiatric medications have potential side effects, not everyone experiences them. It is a unique experience for each person and the way one medication affects one person may not be the same for another.

Some Side Effects

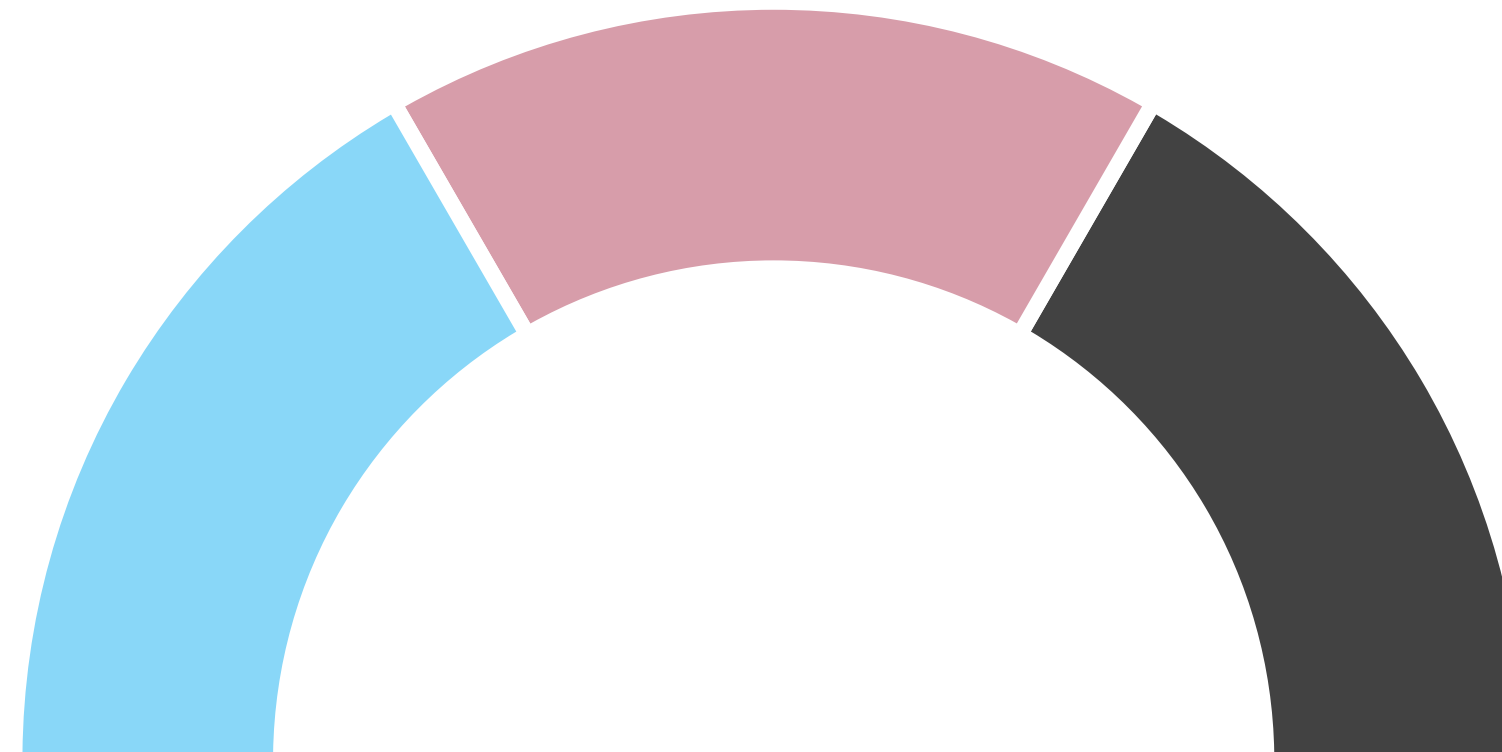
like weight changes and insomnia,
may require adjustments.

Mild Side Effects

like nausea and drowsiness,
often improve with time.

Severe Side Effects

like allergic reactions or suicidal
thoughts, need **immediate
medical attention.**



Tracking symptoms helps identify which side effects improve and which need discussion with a doctor. Visit my website camabbott.com for additional tracking resources.

Common Side Effects by Medication Type

It is important to remember that side effects vary by person and you should always talk to your doctor about how you are feeling!

Medication Type	Common Side Effects	How to Manage
Antidepressants	Nausea, headache, sexual dysfunction, weight changes	Take with food, stay hydrated, discuss alternatives with a doctor
Mood Stabilizers	Fatigue, weight gain, tremors, memory issues	Monitor diet, stay active, ask about dosage adjustments
Antipsychotics	Drowsiness, dizziness, weight gain, restlessness	Take at night (if sedating), ask about alternative meds
Anxiolytics	Drowsiness, dizziness, dependency risk (for benzodiazepines)	Use only as prescribed, avoid alcohol, discuss long-term plans with a doctor
Stimulants	Insomnia, loss of appetite, increased heart rate	Take in the morning, eat before taking, monitor heart health

When to Call Your Doctor

Some side effects are serious and require immediate attention. Report concerns early rather than waiting until symptoms worsen.

- ✓ Suicidal thoughts or worsening depression/anxiety
- ✓ Severe allergic reactions (swelling, difficulty breathing, rash)
- ✓ Extreme mood swings or agitation
- ✓ Serotonin Syndrome (fast heart rate, sweating, confusion, shaking)
- ✓ Uncontrollable muscle movements or stiffness

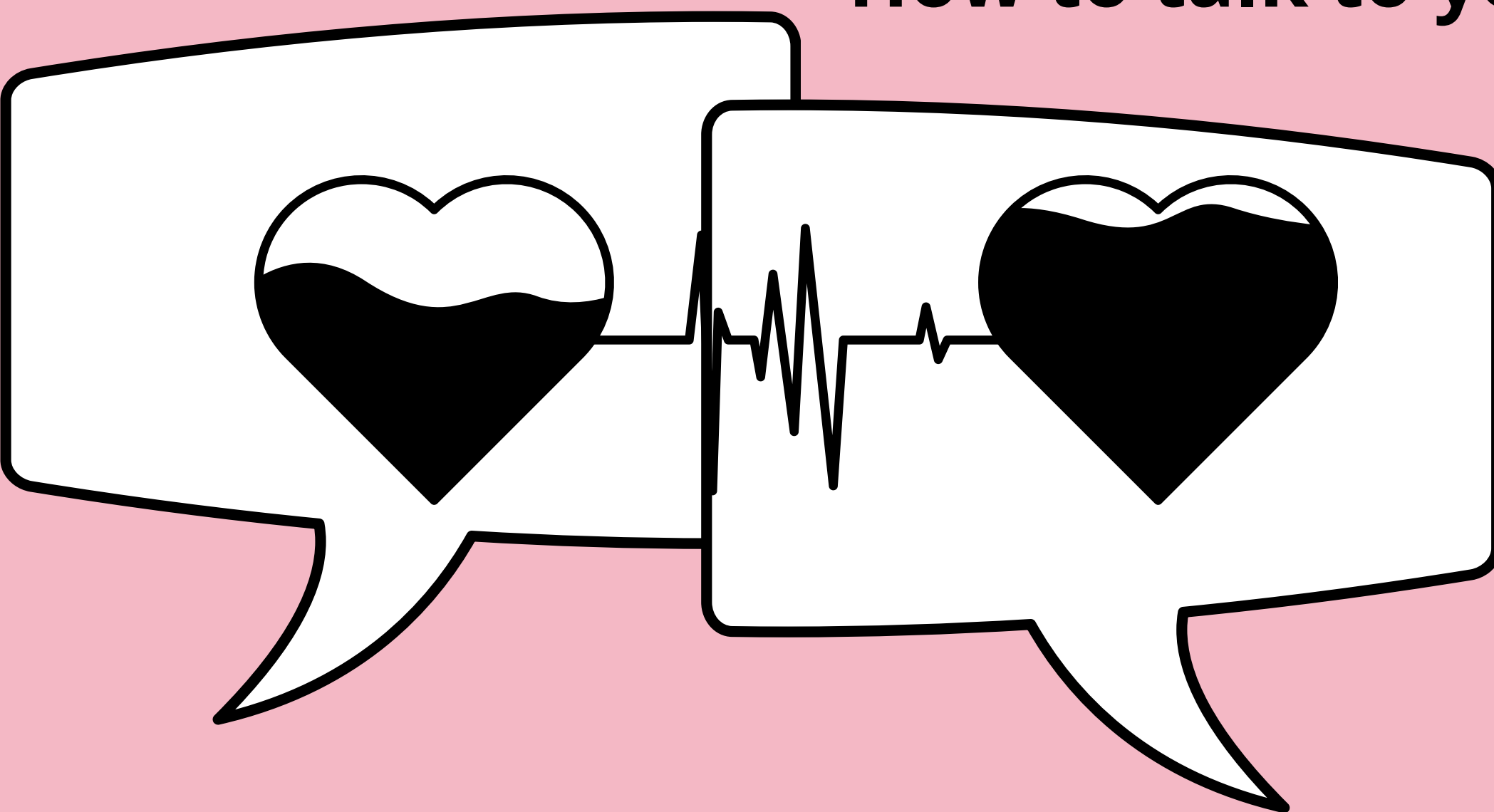
Managing Common Side Effects

If you are experiencing any side effects, you should talk to your doctor. They can often be managed with simple adjustments!

Side Effect	What to Do
Nausea	Take medication with food, drink water, try ginger or peppermint tea
Drowsiness/Fatigue	Take at night (if sedating), adjust dosage timing with doctor
Insomnia	Take medication earlier, avoid caffeine, practice sleep hygiene
Weight Changes	Monitor diet, stay active, discuss alternative meds with a doctor
Sexual Side Effects	Ask about adjusting dose or switching to another medication
Tremors/Shakiness	Reduce caffeine intake, ask if dosage can be lowered

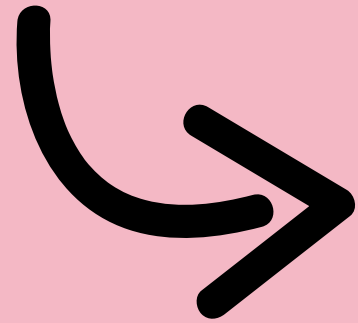
Section 4:

How to talk to your doctor & self-advocate

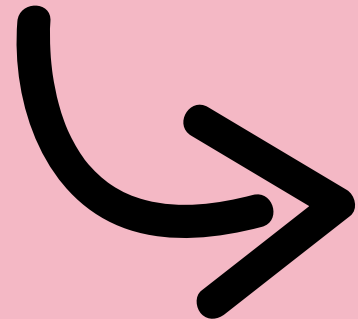


Why Self-Advocacy Matters

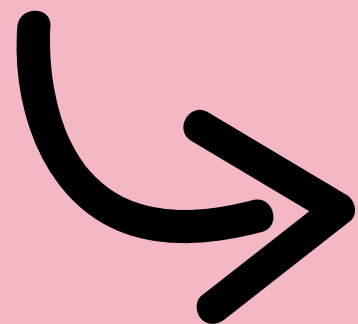
Your voice is important in your treatment. You know yourself better than anyone else. Advocating for yourself leads to better care and ensures your concerns are heard.



You have the right to ask questions, request changes, or get a second opinion.



Doctors rely on your input—they don't know how a medication is affecting you unless you tell them.



Having an open and transparent conversation increases collaboration in your treatment and can improve outcomes more effectively.

What to Prepare Before a Doctor's Visit

Coming prepared helps you get the most out of your appointment.

- ✓ Write down questions in advance so you don't forget them.
- ✓ Track your symptoms & side effects (bring your medication tracker).
- ✓ List any concerns or changes you've noticed (e.g., mood, energy, sleep).
- ✓ Know your rights—you can decline medications, ask about alternatives, or request a different provider.

Use these questions to guide the conversation and make informed choices.

Starting a New Medication:

- ✓ What is this medication for, and how does it work?
- ✓ What are the most common side effects?
- ✓ How long will it take to notice changes?
- ✓ What happens if I miss a dose?

Ongoing Medication Check-Ins:

- ✓ How is my progress based on what you see?
- ✓ Can we adjust the dose or try something different?
- ✓ Are there therapy or lifestyle changes that could help alongside medication?

Before Stopping a Medication:

- ✓ Can I stop this medication, or should I taper off slowly?
- ✓ What withdrawal symptoms should I expect?
- ✓ Are there alternative medications if I don't like this one?

How to Speak Up & Get What You Need

Doctors are busy, but being clear and direct makes them more likely to listen.

- ✓ Use “I” statements – (“I’ve noticed I feel more tired since starting this medication.”)
- ✓ Be specific – (“I’ve had nausea every morning for two weeks.”)
- ✓ Stay calm & assertive – Avoid downplaying your concerns.
- ✓ If a doctor dismisses you, ask again or seek a second opinion.

If you feel unheard, you have options!

- ✓ Rephrase your concerns & ask again.
- ✓ Request a patient advocate or social worker.
- ✓ Ask about alternative medications or providers.
- ✓ Seek a second opinion if needed.

**Section 5:
FAQs About Psychiatric Medication**



Frequently Asked Questions

Your treatment is YOURS—ask questions, advocate for yourself, and work with your doctor to find what works best!

How long does it take for psychiatric medications to work?

- Most antidepressants and mood stabilizers take 4–6 weeks to show full effects.
- Stimulants work immediately, while antipsychotics and anxiolytics vary.

What if I experience side effects?

- Mild side effects often improve over time—track them and discuss with your doctor.
- Serious side effects (suicidal thoughts, allergic reactions, extreme agitation) require immediate medical attention.

Can I stop taking my medication if I feel better?

- Never stop suddenly—some medications require tapering to avoid withdrawal symptoms.
- Always consult your doctor before making changes.

What if I don't like my medication?

- You can ask about alternatives or adjust the dose with your doctor's guidance.
- Advocating for yourself is important—your treatment should work for you.

What happens if I miss a dose?

- Follow your doctor's instructions. Some meds can be taken later, while others should be skipped until the next dose.

What if my doctor won't listen to me?

- Rephrase concerns and be direct about your experience.
- Ask for a patient advocate or second opinion if needed.