
Side Effect Management: Quick Tips

Last updated May 2024

Introduction

This cheat sheet quickly reminds you of common strategies for managing side effects from psychiatric medications. For more detailed information, refer to our comprehensive fact sheets on each side effect.

Akathisia

- Lower dose or switch to another medication.
- Propranolol (Inderal) 10 mg-20 mg BID
- Inderal LA 60 mg QD
- Benzodiazepines
- Mirtazapine (Remeron) 15 mg daily
- Switch to quetiapine (Seroquel), clozapine (Clozaril), or lurasidone (Latuda)—these cause little if any akathisia
- Benztropine (Cogentin) 1 -2 mg BID

Constipation

- Increase fluids
- Increase dietary fiber, eat prunes
- Docusate (Colace) 100 mg BID (stool softener)
- Psyllium (Metamucil) 1 Tbls TID (bulk forming)
- Polyethylene glycol (Miralax) 17 gm QD (osmotic laxative)
- Magnesium citrate 150 mL-300 mL daily (osmotic laxative)
- Lactulose (Enulose) 15-30 ml daily (osmotic laxative)
- Senna/docusate (Senokot) 1-2 tabs BID (stimulant laxative)
- Bisacodyl (Dulcolax) 5-30 mg daily (stimulant laxative)

Diarrhea

- Push fluids to prevent dehydration
- If on lithium, check serum lithium level for toxicity.
- Suggest eating bananas, rice, applesauce, and toast.
- Loperamide (Imodium): 2 mg after every loose stool, not to go over 16 mg a day.
- Bismuth salicylate (Pepto-Bismol): 30 mL or two tablets every 30 minutes for up to eight doses.
- Diphenoxylate/atropine (Lomotil): 2 tablets four times a day for no more than two days.

Dry Eyes

- Refresh eye drops, instill 2 drops in each eye two times daily at bedtime.

Dry Mouth

- Biotene products (lubricants and humectants to seal in moisture) Gum, oral rinse, toothpaste etc...
- Saliva substitutes, Oralube, Oasis mouth spray
- Pilocarpine (Salagen) 5-10 mg BID or TID drops (pro-cholinergic)
- Bethanechol (Urecholine) 25 mg BID
- Cevimeline (Evoxac) 30 mg capsule up to TID

Dystonia

- Benzotropine (Cogentin) 1-2 mg BID (IM if severe)
- Diphenhydramine (Benadryl) 50 mg QD (IM if severe)
- Diazepam (Valium) 5-10 mg (IM if severe)
- Trihexyphenidyl (Artane) 1-3 mg BID

- Amantadine (Symmetrel) 100 mg-200 mg BID

Excessive sweating

- Terazosin (alpha blocker) 1 mg HS, increase up to 4-6 mg HS
- Clonidine (Catapres) 0.1 mg QD or BID
- Benztropine (Cogentin) 1 mg BID
- Glycopyrrolate 1 mg BID

Fatigue

- Modafinil (Provigil) 100–300 mg daily in divided doses.
- Armodafinil (Nuvigil) 150–250 mg daily in divided doses.
- Psychostimulants, e.g. Methylphenidate (e.g, Ritalin) or Dextroamphetamine (e.g., Adderall) 5-10 mg daily, increase up to 20 mg BID.

Nausea

- Take meds just after meals
- Split dose
- Switch to delayed release formulations
- Spoonful of peanut butter before taking the medication
- Ginger root capsules 250-1000 mg 3-4 times daily prn
- Ondansetron (Zofran) 4 mg-8 mg Q 8 hrs prn
- Metoclopramide (Reglan) 10 mg TID prn
- Omeprazole (Prilosec) 20-40 mg daily before meals, especially if there is GERD

Orthostatic hypotension (20 mm drop in systolic or 10 mm in diastolic lying to standing)

- Stand up slowly
- Split dosing
- Use extended release versions if available
- Compression stockings
- Prevent dehydration
- Increase salt intake
- Fludrocortisone (Florinef) 0.1 mg-0.3 mg daily

Parkinsonism

- Benztropine (Cogentin) 1mg BID
- Trihexyphenidyl (Artane) 2 mg BID
- Diphenhydramine (Benadryl) 50 mg QD
- Amantadine (Symmetrel) 100-200 BID

Sexual Dysfunction

- Switch to a medication with low sexual side effects (eg, bupropion, mirtazapine)
- PDE-5 inhibitor, such as sildenafil (Viagra) or tadalafil (Cialis).
- Bupropion (Wellbutrin) 75-150 mg daily.
- Buspirone (BuSpar) 30–60 mg daily.
- Cyproheptadine (Periactin) 8 mg 30 minutes before sex.
- Amantadine (Symmetrel) 100 mg daily

Sialorrhea (excessive drooling)

- Chew sugarless gum
- Towel over pillow
- Glycopyrrolate (Robinul), 1 mg HS, then 1-2 mg BID.

Tardive Dyskinesia

- Valbenazine (Ingrezza) 40 mg/day, increase to 80 mg after one week
- Deutetrabenazine (Austedo) 6 mg twice daily, increase to max of 48 mg daily
- Amantadine (Symmetrel) 100–300 mg/day
- Benzodiazepines (eg, clonazepam [Klonopin] or lorazepam [Ativan]) 0.5–1 mg daily or BID

Tremor

- Propranolol (Inderal) 10 mg BID as needed, can increase up to 30–120 mg daily in two or three divided doses.
- Inderal LA. Long-acting propranolol that can be dosed 60–80 mg once a day.
- Benzotropine (Cogentin) 1 mg BID for parkinsonian tremor (due to antipsychotics).

Weight Gain

- Metformin XR (Glucophage XR, Glumetza) 500–2000 mg: Take with largest meal, split into two doses if needed
- Topiramate (Topamax) 50–300 mg/day
- Olanzapine/samidorphan (Lybalvi) as an alternative to olanzapine alone to reduce weight gain.
- Orlistat (Xenical) 120 mg three times daily after meals
- Semaglutide (Ozempic): Start with 0.25 mg subcutaneous injection once weekly for 4 weeks, then increase to 0.5 mg once weekly.