

Psychiatric Medication

What is a Psychiatrist?



A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who has special training in the diagnosis and treatment of mental health issues. At CWC, your primary contact is with your therapist, who works with you to talk through your problems. Sometimes you or your therapist may feel that talking is not enough, and they will refer you to a psychiatrist. A psychiatrist can help determine if medication is appropriate for you and can prescribe and monitor that medication. The psychiatrist can also help identify when medical problems may be contributing to your mood.

How Do I know if I Need Medication?

Your therapist will spend several sessions getting to know you, your concerns, and your background. Some concerns are best treated with therapy alone, while other issues may improve with medication. You and your therapist will have a conversation about whether medication might help you. Seeing the psychiatrist for a consultation does not obligate you to take medication - it just means that you're interested in learning more about how medication may help your specific concerns.

How Do Psychiatric Medications Work?

In general, the medications work to correct an imbalance in brain chemistry that underlies certain disorders. For example, depression is associated with low levels of a brain chemical called serotonin, and antidepressants work by increasing the amount of serotonin available in the brain.



Will Medication Change My Personality?

Medication will not change who you are as a person, your unique personal characteristics, or your life circumstances. The goal of psychiatric medications is to allow you to feel better and enjoy life.

Are There any Side Effects?

Psychiatric medications are relatively safe treatments in healthy people when prescribed by a doctor. However, medications can have side effects, such as upset stomach, drowsiness, headache, as well as others. These usually improve or resolve after taking the medication for several days. Ask your doctor about the side effects that are specific to your medication, and let them know your concerns. Also let them know about any other drugs - prescribed, over-the-counter, or recreational - that you take, as these can interact with psychiatric medications. Medications may be harmful in pregnant women - be sure to tell your doctor if you are pregnant or think you might be pregnant.

How Long Will it Take to Feel Better?

Psychiatric medications usually take four to six weeks to work, although many people feel benefit in two weeks. Others often notice improvements in your mood before you do.



Can I Use My Friend's Prescription or Let Them Use Mine?

Absolutely not! Psychiatrists select medications very carefully. What might be the right medication for one person could be harmful, even life-threatening, to another. If your friend seems anxious or depressed and you think they need some help, refer them to a mental health professional.

Acknowledgement: Some material borrowed from Texas Women's University Counseling Center Self-Help Library

