

# MEDICATION

## DOES EVERYONE WHO LIVES WITH MENTAL ILLNESS HAVE TO BE ON MEDICATION?

- No. In some cases, the right combination of therapy and/or other supports can allow someone to feel strong in their recovery. However, many people experience mental illnesses are very likely to need medication during their recovery.
- If you have strong hesitations about medication or other mental health services, it may help to talk with a peer: another person who lives with mental illness. Check out pages 31-33.
- If you have a loved one who does not feel they need treatment, learn about peer support (pg. 31-33), seek support from other family members and check out pages 62-63.

## ARE MEDICATIONS ADDICTIVE?

All psychiatric drugs have the potential to cause “withdrawal” reactions. You should never stop taking your medicine or change the dosage without talking to your doctor. Side effects of sudden changes can range from unpleasant to very dangerous. However, following your doctor’s instructions about dose reduction or discontinuation will reduce or eliminate the risk of withdrawal reactions.

For information about medication and people with dual diagnoses (someone diagnosed with both a mental illness and a substance use disorder), please see pages 34-35.

## WHO CAN PRESCRIBE MEDICATION?

Psychiatrists (MD) • Physicians (medical doctors, MD) • Advanced Practice Nurse Practitioner (APNP) • Physician’s assistant (PA)

## DO I HAVE TO BE ON MEDICATION FOREVER?

Many people who live with serious mental illnesses find medication essential throughout their lives. Others do not. In many cases, the type and/or dosage may change (increase or decrease) over time. There is no “one-size-fits all” approach to medication.

## CAN MEDICATION “CURE” MENTAL ILLNESS?

No. Psychiatric medications do not make illnesses disappear. However, they can help to make symptoms extremely manageable. Medication should be accompanied by other supports that address non-medical elements in the recovery process: self-esteem, social support, a sense of belonging and opportunities for meaningful involvement in the community.



### **WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT SPECIFIC MEDICATIONS?**

You can visit NAMI's website: [nami.org](http://nami.org)

Click on the "Treatment" tab at the top and you'll find a section devoted to medication. You can also visit [medlineplus.gov](http://medlineplus.gov), a website of the National Institute of Health.

### **WHERE CAN I KEEP UPDATED ON THE LATEST (NON-PHARMA FUNDED) PHARMACOLOGICAL RESEARCH?**

You can visit the National Institute on Mental Health (NIMH) website for extensive reports on current research: [nimh.nih.gov](http://nimh.nih.gov)

You can also visit the U.S. Food and Drug Administration website: [www.fda.gov/drugs](http://www.fda.gov/drugs)



## **Tips FOR MEDICATION MANAGEMENT**

### **ASK QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU START TAKING A MEDICATION!**

- What does this medication do and how will it help me?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- How will it interact with other medications? Make sure the doctor knows all medication you take (prescribed and otherwise).
- What are the side effects and how can I manage them?
- When should I expect a positive change?
- Are there other ways to take this medication, such as a long-acting injection?
- What is a possible next step if this medication is not effective?



### **ASK QUESTIONS ALL THE TIME!**

- Do you feel like your doctor is listening and understanding your concerns about your medication? If not, see pages 38-39.
- Does medication help you get or keep things in your life that are most important to you?
- Does your medication ever get in the way of your life or prevent positive change from happening?
- Are you having trouble keeping track of your medications?