

HEALTH & SAFETY: PSYCHIATRIC MEDICATIONS

“Antidepressants”

BQIS/Outreach Fact Sheets provide a general overview on topics important to supporting an individual’s health and safety and to improving their quality of life. This is the eighth of ten Fact Sheets regarding Psychotropic Medications.

Objectives

Individuals will understand why antidepressants are prescribed, how they work, common side effects, occasional side effects, and serious side effects, how the physician monitors this medicine and the actions needed to support someone on these medications.

Definitions

Antidepressants: a medication often used to improve mood, or reduce anxiety or agitation.

Tyramine: a compound found in many aged or processed foods, produced from the natural breakdown of the amino acid, tyrosine. This includes foods that are aged, dried, fermented, salted, smoked or pickled; all nuts; and all alcoholic and fermented beverages.

Facts

- There are different types of antidepressants:
 - Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs),
 - Serotonin norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRI),
 - Tricyclic (TCAs)
 - Monamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs)
- MAOIs can cause a dangerous increase in blood pressure if an individual eats food containing tyramine.
- These medicines work by:
 - Decreasing mood swings.
 - Decreasing depression.
 - Decreasing anxiety.

- Common side effects (may decrease after several weeks):
 - Weight gain or weight loss
 - Upset stomach, nausea, vomiting
 - Diarrhea
 - Headaches
 - Anxiety/agitation/restlessness or nervousness
 - Tremors
 - Sedation
 - Insomnia
 - Dizziness
 - Increased sweating
 - Difficulty with sexual functioning
- Occasional side effects (Needs to be reported to the physician within several weeks):
 - Frequent yawning
 - Blurred vision
 - Fatigue
- Occasional but serious side effects (Call the physician that day):
 - New or increase in suicidal thoughts
 - Decreased need for sleep, talking fast, feeling very excited or irritable
 - Increase in blood pressure or heart rate
- Side effects that are dangerous (Need to go to the ER immediately):
 - Seizures
 - Restlessness with confusion, shaking or jerking, sweating or the skin turning red
- How the physician monitors this medicine:
 - Checking for a past history or family history of mania
 - Checking pulse rate and blood pressure at each visit
 - Review information such as weight records, sleep pattern, activity level, and behavioral data presented at each appointment

Recommended Actions and Prevention Strategies

1. Administer medications as prescribed
2. Watch for anything different/change in status about the person and for signs and symptoms of side effects of medications
3. Document noted signs and symptoms of side effects of medications and changes in status of the person
4. Communicate noted signs and symptoms of side effects of medications and changes in status of the person to supervisor/nurse immediately as indicated according to the seriousness of symptoms as listed above.

5. Seek medical attention as indicated according to the seriousness of symptoms as listed above
6. Monitor for effectiveness of medication by documenting target behavior data that relate to diagnosis
7. Ensure AIMS is completed and results of AIM and other data including weight is presented to physician/psychiatrist during scheduled appointments

Learning Assessment

Questions that can be used to verify a person's competency in the material contained in this Fact Sheet:

1. Antidepressants are used to decrease:
 - A. Depression
 - B. Anxiety
 - C. Mood swings
 - D. All of the above
2. Common side effects of antidepressants include:
 - A. Headaches
 - B. Muscle twitching
 - C. Seizures
 - D. Hair Loss
3. Occasional side effects of antidepressants include:
 - A. Blurred vision
 - B. Confusion
 - C. Trouble speaking
 - D. Nausea
4. Serious side effects of antidepressants include:
 - A. Suicidal ideation
 - B. Irritability
 - C. Bed-wetting
 - D. Hair loss
5. To help monitor the condition of someone receiving an antipsychotic medication, it is important to do all of the following except:
 - A. Watch for any changes in the person
 - B. Document observations of possible side effects of medications
 - C. Report to your supervisor how the person is doing every other month
 - D. Take target behavior and weight data to medical appointments for the physician/psychiatrist's review

References

- Dulcan MK (editor). Helping Parents, Youth, and Teachers Understand Medications for Behavioral and Emotional Problems: A Resource Book of Medication Information Handouts, Third Edition. Washington, DC, AmericanPsychiatric Publishing, 2007
- Stahl SM. Essential Psychopharmacology: The Prescriber's Guide. Cambridge, UK, The Press Syndicate of The University of Cambridge, 2005

Related Resources

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry www.aacap.org/cs/forFamilies

National Institute of Mental Health

nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/mental-health-medications/complete-index.shtml

Learning Assessment Answers

1. D
2. A
3. A
4. A
5. C

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