Objectives

Individuals will understand why SSRIs or SNRIs are prescribed, how they work, common side effects, occasional side effects, serious side effects and how the physician monitors this medicine.

Definitions

Selective Serotonin Re-uptake Inhibitors (SSRIs): A class of medications that affect the activity of serotonin.

Serotonin and Norepinephrine Re-uptake Inhibitors (SNRIs): A class of medications that affect the activity of serotonin and norepinephrine.

Serotonin: A hormone found in various locations of the body including the brain that acts both as a chemical messenger that transmits nerve signals between nerve cells, and that causes blood vessels to narrow.

Norepinephrine: a chemical responsible for moving nerve impulses between neurons. It also acts as a stress hormone and plays a role in a person’s fight-or-flight response. In this role, it increases a person’s heart rate and blood flow to the muscles; it also stimulates the release of blood sugar and is often compared to adrenaline.

Facts

- SSRIs and SNRIs medications include: (Prozac (fluoxetine), Zoloft (sertraline), Paxil (paroxetine), Luvox (fluvoxamine), Lexapro (escitalopram), Celexa (citalopram), Cymbalta (duloxetine), Effexor (venalafaxine), Pristiq (desvenlafaxine)
- SSRIs and SNRIs are available in:
  - Liquid (depending on medication)
  - Tablets (depending on medication)
These medicines work by:
- Decreasing mood swings
- Decreasing depression
- Decreasing anxiety

Common side effects include (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 (call the physician within several week):
- 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

Very rare but extremely serious side effects (Need to go to the ER immediately):
- Seizures
- Restlessness with confusion, shaking or jerking, sweating or the skin turning red

How the physician monitors these medicines:
- Checking for a past history or family history of mania
- Checking pulse rate and blood pressure at each visit

**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
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

Learning Assessment

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

1. SSRIs and SNRIs are used to decrease:
   A. Depression
   B. Anxiety
   C. Mood swings
   D. All of the above

2. Common side effects of SSRIs/SNRIs include:
   A. Headaches
   B. Muscle twitching
   C. Seizures
   D. Hair Loss

3. Occasional side effects of SSRIs/SNRIs include:
   A. Blurred vision
   B. Confusion
   C. Trouble speaking
   D. Nausea

4. Serious side effects of SSRI/SNRIs include:
   A. Suicidal ideation
   B. Irritability
   C. Bed-wetting
   D. Hair loss

References


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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

Outreach Services

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As a service for persons supporting individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities, Outreach and the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community developed the Outreach Fact Sheet Library. The information provided is designed to enhance the understanding of the topic and does not replace other professional or medical instructions or individually developed plans. For more fact sheets and information, please visit DDRSOutreach.IN.gov and www.iidc.indiana.edu/training.

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