Staying healthy while taking antipsychotic medications

For patients and families

You are taking antipsychotic medications to help your mental health. Like all medications, they can cause side effects. Some side effects of antipsychotic medications may increase your chances of developing health problems in the future.

By learning to prevent or manage these side effects, you can improve the health of your body as well as your mind.
What side effects of my medication could affect my health?

Antipsychotic medications can interfere with your metabolism. This is the process your body uses to get or make energy from the food you eat.

As a result, you may develop metabolic side effects such as:

- weight gain, especially around the waist
- high blood sugar
- high blood pressure
- high triglycerides (a type of fat in the blood), which is bad for your heart
- low HDL or "good" cholesterol, which protects your heart

Side effects are different with each medication. Not every person will have side effects, but many do.

If you have 3 or more of these side effects, this is called Metabolic Syndrome. Metabolic Syndrome increases your chances of developing heart disease, diabetes and stroke.
What can I do to stay healthy?

The good news is that you can prevent or manage these side effects with a healthy lifestyle. Try to eat a healthy diet, get regular physical activity and if you smoke, cut back or stop.

You don’t have to change your life all at once. Start with one small change that you think is possible.

When you are successful, set another small goal for yourself. In time, you will be able to see and feel the difference!

Eat a healthy diet

1. Choose healthy foods that are high in fibre and low in fat, salt and sugar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choose more often</th>
<th>Choose less often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ foods from plants, such as fruits, vegetables, beans, peas and lentils</td>
<td>✗ red meat (beef, pork and lamb) and processed meats (hot dogs, bacon, sausage and deli-meats)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ whole grain breads, cereals and pasta</td>
<td>✗ fried foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ chicken, turkey or fish</td>
<td>✗ foods with lots of sugar, such as cookies, cake and pies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ skim, 1% or 2% milk and milk products</td>
<td>✗ sugary drinks such as regular pop and juice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ water (6 to 8 glasses a day)</td>
<td>✗ drinks with alcohol</td>
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2. Plan to eat well every day
   ✓ Don’t skip meals. Start each day with breakfast.
   ✓ Eat regularly, about every 4 hours during the day, so you won’t get too hungry.
   ✓ Have several small meals a day, instead of 2 or 3 large meals.
   ✓ Don’t add salt to your food at the table.
   ✓ If you are on a budget, visit a food bank for healthy foods or access food programs for free or low cost meals.

**Healthy eating:**

✓ You don’t have to change your life all at once. Start with one small change that you think is possible.
✓ When you are successful, set another small goal for yourself. In time, you will be able to see and feel the difference!

**Get regular physical activity**

✓ Plan some exercise or activity most days of the week.
✓ Walking is an easy way to be active. Even a 10-minute walk, 2 or 3 times a day can benefit your body and mind.
✓ Try to walk a little more each time, enough to get your heart beating faster.
✓ Take the stairs or do lunges, squats or push-ups for stronger muscles.
Being more active:

✓ makes your body stronger and more fit
✓ helps you lose weight and stay at a healthy weight
✓ helps raise HDL or ‘good’ cholesterol
✓ helps control blood sugar and blood pressure
✓ boosts your mood and good feelings about yourself

If you smoke, try to cut back or quit

• Make a plan to reduce or quit smoking (cigarettes and other substances).
• Help is available. Ask your mental health team about University Health Network’s programs to help you quit. You can also talk to your family doctor, call Smokers’ Helpline at 1-877-513-5333, or go to www.smokershelpline.ca

Quitting smoking:

✓ Helps you breathe more easily, have more energy and feel less stress
✓ Helps prevent heart disease so you will live longer

How can my family doctor help?

See your family doctor regularly. Your doctor will help you measure and track your:

• weight
• waist size
• blood pressure
• blood sugar
• levels of HDL cholesterol and triglycerides
This is called metabolic monitoring. This should begin about 2 months after you start taking anti-psychotic medication, and continue at least once a year after that.

If you develop metabolic side effects, your doctor may:

- Switch you to an anti-psychotic medication that has fewer metabolic side effects.
- Prescribe medication to treat metabolic side effects. You may benefit from taking medication to lower blood pressure, lower blood sugar or raise ‘good’ cholesterol in addition to a healthy lifestyle.

If you are concerned about metabolic side effects, talk with your doctor. Do not stop taking your antipsychotic medication. Treating your mental health condition is most important.

If you have any questions or need help, please talk with your family doctor or your mental health team. They can give you the education and support you need to improve the health of your mind and body.