

# ANTICHOLINERGICS

## *An – tea – coal – in – er – jiks*

### ***Why have I been prescribed an anticholinergic?***

Certain types of medication (known as antipsychotics or neuroleptics) used to treat schizophrenia, psychosis and similar conditions, may give some people "the shakes". They can also make some people feel stiff, which is uncomfortable and painful. You have been prescribed an anticholinergic to help prevent or relieve some of these side effects. They don't help all the side effects of antipsychotics. They can even make some worse. If they don't help you much, other options are available.

Anticholinergics are also used to treat the symptoms of certain conditions such as Parkinson's disease and other movement disorders.

### ***What are anticholinergics?***

"Anticholinergics" is the name of a group of medicines prescribed to relieve these side effects.

Examples of anticholinergics are procyclidine ('*Kemadrin*'), orphenadrine ('*Disipal*'), benzhexol or trihexyphenidyl ('*Artane*') and benztropine ('*Cogentin*').

### ***Are anticholinergics safe to take?***

It is usually safe to have anticholinergics as prescribed by your doctor, but they don't suit everyone. Let your doctor know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- a) If you have glaucoma, or suffer from liver, heart, stomach, kidney or prostate trouble:
- b) If you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant.

### ***How should I take my anticholinergic?***

Look at the label on your medicine; it should have all the necessary instructions on it. Follow this advice carefully. If you have any questions, speak to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse. Most medicines are now dispensed with an information leaflet.

### ***What should I do if I miss a dose?***

Never change your dose without checking with your doctor. If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember, as long as it is within a few hours of the usual time. Sometimes these drugs may be taken only when you think you need them, rather than regularly. Work out with your doctor the best way for you to take these tablets.

### ***What will happen to me when I start taking an anticholinergic?***

The stiffness or shaking that you are experiencing will usually become less severe within one or two hours of taking the first dose. The full effect may take a little longer to come about.

Unfortunately, you might get some side effects from your anticholinergic. Most of these are quite mild and should go away after a week or so. Look at the table overleaf. It tells you what to do if you do get some of these. There are many other possible side effects. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect.

Side effect	What is it?	What should I do if this happens to me?
<b>COMMON</b>		
ANXIETY	Feeling nervous	This should go with time. If you are worried, contact your doctor.
BLURRED VISION	Things look fuzzy and you can't focus properly.	Don't drive. See your doctor if you are worried. You won't need glasses.
CONSTIPATION	Feeling "bunched up" inside. You can't pass a motion or stool.	Eat more fibre e.g. bran, fruit and vegetables. Do more walking. Make sure you drink plenty of fluid. A mild laxative from a pharmacy might help.
DIZZINESS	Feeling light-headed and faint.	Don't stand up too quickly. Try and lie down when you feel it coming on. Don't drive.
DRY MOUTH	Not much saliva or spit.	Sugar-free boiled sweets, chewing gum or eating citrus fruits usually helps. If not, your doctor can give you a mouth spray. A change in medicine or dose may be possible.
STOMACH UPSET	This includes feeling and being sick and getting diarrhoea.	If it's mild, see your pharmacist. If it lasts for more than a day or so, stop taking your anticholinergic and see your doctor.
<b>RARE</b>		
CONFUSION	Your mind is all mixed up.	Contact your doctor soon.
URINE RETENTION	Not much urine passed.	Contact your doctor soon.

### **What about alcohol?**

It is officially recommended that people taking anticholinergics should not drink alcohol. This is because both anticholinergics and alcohol can cause drowsiness. If the two are taken at the same time, severe drowsiness can result. This can lead to falls or accidents. As well as this, drinking alcohol often makes your mood unstable. Excessive drinking is especially likely to do this. Once people are used to taking medication, they can sometimes drink alcohol in small amounts without any harm. Avoid alcohol altogether for the first one or two months. After this, if you want a drink, try a glass of your normal drink and see how you feel. If this doesn't make you feel drowsy, then it is probably OK to drink small amounts. It pays to be very cautious because alcohol affects people in different ways, especially when they are taking medication.

Don't stop taking your medication because you fancy a drink at the weekend. If you do drink alcohol, drink only small amounts. Never drink any alcohol and drive while on anticholinergics. Discuss any concerns you may have with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

### **When can I stop this medication?**

Some people find that after a few months, they can come off their anticholinergic and the original side effects of the other medication do not come back. You and your doctor should decide together when you should stop this medication.

Anticholinergics are not thought to be addictive but some people find they start to enjoy some of their effects. This means they might have some difficulty stopping them.

Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some of the effects of medication. You may also find other books or leaflets useful. If you have access to the internet you may find a lot of information there as well, but be careful, as internet based information is not always accurate.



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