

Psychiatric Meds & Diabetes

Diabetes is common among people in mental health recovery. Psychiatric medications do not cause type 1 diabetes. But some psychiatric medications increase the chance of developing type 2 diabetes or insulin resistance (which is when the body can't use insulin properly and sugar builds up in the blood).

Some studies show that taking the newer "second generation" antipsychotics increases people's chances of developing diabetes. Antipsychotic drugs of concern are: clozapine, olanzapine, risperidone, and quetiapine. More recent drugs such as ziprasidone, amisulpride, and aripiprazole may be less likely to lead to diabetes, but need further study.

Not everyone taking psychiatric medications will develop diabetes. Instead, people who use certain medications are at increased risk. The weight gain caused by many medications is one reason why people who take them are at greater risk for diabetes. Not getting enough exercise is another reason. You can lower your risks by watching your weight and exercising. You'll find many handouts to help with this in our Diabetes Toolkit.

If you take antipsychotic medication or have a diagnosis of schizophrenia, screening is important for you:

- ⇒ Your doctor should assess your personal and family history of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, and whether any other medicines you take can cause weight gain.
- ⇒ Your doctor should check your A1C every 2-3 months and your blood sugar at every visit. This is especially important if you have started taking a new antipsychotic medication.
- ⇒ Your doctor should weigh you at your first visit and again at 4, 8, and 12 weeks after starting or changing an antipsychotic medication. After that, you should be weighed every 3 months.
- ⇒ If you gain 5% of your initial weight at any time while using antipsychotic medication, you and your doctor should talk about other options.
- ⇒ If you want to stop taking psychiatric medications entirely, please talk with your doctor or other providers, since abrupt changes in medications can be harmful.

If you do choose to try a different psychiatric medication, it's important that:

- ⇒ You ask your doctor how much of a problem weight gain is with that medication, and whether there are others you can take instead.
- ⇒ You and your doctor continue to monitor your weight.
- ⇒ Your doctor checks your blood pressure and the amount of cholesterol and triglycerides (two kinds of fat) in your blood.
- ⇒ You talk with your doctor about the benefits and drawbacks of taking drugs to manage your blood sugar, blood pressure, or cholesterol. Once you have diabetes, these medicines may improve and lengthen your life.

We encourage you to take this sheet to your health care providers and discuss what is best for you. No matter what prescription, over-the-counter, or alternative medicines you take, keep working toward a healthy lifestyle that meets your needs.