

# Atypical antipsychotics (Neuroleptics) including Clozapine (Clozaril/Clopine)

## Information for patients

This leaflet will help you know about

Atypical antipsychotic medications are less likely to cause uncomfortable side-effects than the typical medications. Sometimes these medications are used for people who have had side effects like stiffness or unwanted movements with other medications. These side effects are much less common with these medications.

Clozapine may be used for people who have not been helped by other medicines.

## Glossary of Drug Names

Generic Name	Brand Name
Clozapine	Clozaril Clopine
Risperidone	Risperdal/ Risperdal Consta
Olanzapine	Zyprexa
Quetiapine	Seroquel
Ziprasidone	Zeldox
Aripiprazole	Abilify
Amisulpride	Solian

## What are they for?

These medicines are useful if you are feeling confused or frightened, or if you hear voices in your head or when no-one is near, or if you have thoughts that are unpleasant or disturb you. They are also used to control hallucinations and delusions.

## Should I stop taking other medicine before starting this drug?

If you are starting **Clozapine** you will stop taking any other schizophrenia medicines before your first dose. If you are starting another medication, your doctor may have you on both medicines for a little while. You should ask your doctor if you are uncertain. Changing over the medication is often done at home, but you may have to go to hospital to allow your doctor to monitor you.

## How are the medications taken?

Most people take these medications as a tablet. For some people who have problems with swallowing, **Olanzapine** is available as a wafer that dissolves in the mouth, and **Risperidone** is available as a liquid.

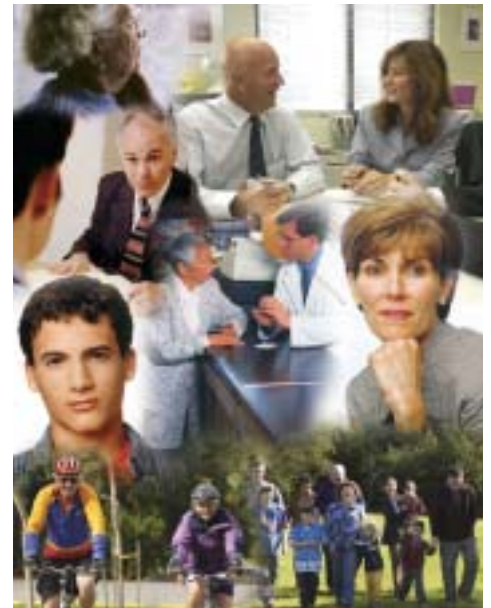
## When will they work?

After taking these medications, most people begin to feel calmer within a few hours. Over the next couple of days you should begin to feel better, and gradually improve over the next six weeks or months. The medications do take time to work completely.

**Clozapine** may take two weeks or longer to feel improvement, so do not be discouraged if you do not feel better right away.

## How much do I need?

Usually you will start with a low dose, which may be gradually increased to find the right amount for you and to give you time to get used to the medicine. Telling your doctor how you feel will help work out the right amount.



## What happens if I miss a dose?

If you forget to take a dose at the usual time, take it as soon as you remember. If it is nearly time for the next dose, then take the normal amount. Do not take a double dose. If you miss taking your medication for more than two days, contact your doctor immediately. If you stop taking these medications suddenly your illness may return very quickly.

## How long will I have to take it?

Your doctor will explain to you why you are taking the medication, and how long the treatment may last. Feeling well does not mean that you should stop taking the tablets, it means that the tablets are keeping you well. These medications are not addictive, and you should talk to your doctor before you stop taking them.

## Do I need blood tests?

If you are taking **Clozapine**, it is important to have blood tests, as a small number of people may develop a blood problem while taking this drug. Therefore, everyone who takes it has a blood test, which will tell the doctor early on if any problem is developing. **Clozapine** is stopped immediately if there is a problem, and the blood usually returns to normal. A blood test will be taken every week for 18 weeks and after that tests will occur about once a month.

## What else should I tell my doctor?

- If you feel that you are becoming ill again, you should tell your doctor as soon as you can. Different medicine or a different dose can help quickly.
- (For women) If you miss a period, think that you may be pregnant, or if you intend getting pregnant you should tell your doctor.
- (If you are taking **Clozapine**) If you have ever had bone marrow disease, epilepsy, heart or blood vessel disease, liver disease or problems with alcohol.
- If you are taking any medicines or have been taking any recently.
- If you feel very hot with fever or develop a sore mouth, gums or throat.
- If your ankles swell, if you feel weak or short of breath, or if you notice an irregular heartbeat.

## What about side-effects?

You may get side effects before you start to feel better. Side effects may be troublesome, but they can often be helped by adjusting the medication or by other methods. Do not stop taking your medication suddenly, but talk to your doctor or pharmacist about any concerns you have.

### If you experience any side effects, report them to your doctor.

#### Common side effects include:

- Drowsiness
- Weight gain
- Changes in the menstrual period
- Occasional bedwetting
- Low blood pressure or dizziness
- Unusual movements  
(**Risperidone, Ziprasidone**)
- Stiffness (**Risperidone**)
- Dry mouth (**Risperidone, Quetiapine**)
- Excess saliva (**Olanzapine, Clozapine**)

#### Uncommon side effects include:

- Severe dizziness
- Swelling of ankles
- Irregular heartbeat
- Feeling weak or short of breath
- Sore mouth, gums or throat

If you experience any of these uncommon side effects while taking these medications, you need to contact your doctor urgently.

## What other things should I be careful with?

- Driving a car or operating machinery – your reactions may be slower.
- Alcohol, which may make you more dizzy or sleepier than usual
- Marijuana, which is likely to make you ill again, despite taking medication.
- Becoming dehydrated. This can happen with:
  - Too much alcohol
  - Exercising in hot weather
  - Severe infections with fever
  - Not drinking enough water
  - Not having enough salt in your diet
  - Vomiting or diarrhoea

**Always tell any other doctor, pharmacist or dentist you may visit that you use this medicine. Some medicines can react with others, even those you buy without a prescription.**

## Note to health professionals:

This leaflet should not replace verbal counselling. In particular, this leaflet is not a substitute for informed consent. This leaflet provides information for patients taking atypical antipsychotics. Reference to any drug or substance does not necessarily imply recommendation by the Victorian Department of Human Services for its use.

Published by the Metropolitan Health and Aged Care Services Division, Victorian Government Department of Human Services, Melbourne Victoria.