



Building a

# *Dialogue* for Recovery With Your Doctor



National  
Mental  
Health  
Association

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s a mental health consumer, there are many things you can do to improve your care and get more out of life. Learning more about your illness, current treatment options and community services is important. The better informed you are, the more you can be an active participant in your care. Building a support network that includes friends and family is also important. This network can support you through any ups and downs you have in your treatment and recovery.

Another key element in recovery is a productive, two-way communication with your doctor, or a ***Dialogue for Recovery***. Developing this type of relationship – based on mutual respect and open communication – with a team of healthcare professionals can make a big difference in helping you to recover from your illness.

This brochure can provide you with guidance on working effectively with your healthcare providers in support of your recovery, especially when discussing side-effects from antipsychotic medications. By building a ***Dialogue for Recovery***, you can become an equal partner with your doctor and care team on choosing the appropriate treatment approach for your illness.

**A *Dialogue for Recovery* is honest, open communication. The goal is to keep getting better.**



## Discussing Medication Side-effects with your Healthcare Provider

Today, more and more people with severe mental illness are recovering their health and quality of life. Advances in antipsychotic medications and improved support programs are helping more people live satisfying, productive lives in their communities. These new treatments, however, are not perfect. As with all medications, you may experience side-effects.

Medication side-effects vary from person to person. One individual may have difficulty taking a particular medication while another person will not have any problems taking the same one. Often a medication will produce side-effects when you first begin taking it, and those side-effects will decrease as your body gets used to it.

If you are being prescribed an antipsychotic or other medication, it is extremely important to discuss with your doctor the benefits and side-effects you may be experiencing. Ideally, you should have a conversation about benefits and possible side-effects before you begin taking a medication.

The Antipsychotic Side-effects Checklist (ASC), included in this brochure, is designed to help you discuss side-effects of antipsychotic medications with your doctor or other mental healthcare providers. As your healthcare providers review your checklist and discuss each item with you, they can help determine whether you're experiencing a side-effect, as opposed to a symptom of your illness.

Together you can gauge your tolerance of any side-effects and work to reduce both symptoms and side-effects. You can also determine whether you are comfortable staying on your medication, or need to change the dose or switch to another treatment. You should consider how and if your treatment is helping you get further along in your recovery. Working along with your doctor, you should be able to find the right combination of medications and dosages for treating your illness.

### Other Considerations When Taking Medications



- It is generally not advisable to abruptly stop any medication unless you are experiencing life-threatening problems. Suddenly stopping a medication can lead to unpleasant or even dangerous consequences. Your doctor can discuss the best way to taper you off the dosage if it's determined that you should discontinue treatment.

- Some medications can be dangerous if taken in combination with other medicines. If you are taking medications that have been prescribed by more than one doctor, it's important that each of your doctors and your pharmacist know all of the medications that you are taking.
- If you are a woman and pregnant or considering pregnancy, alert your doctor immediately before beginning any medications.
- Since weight gain is often a side-effect of many antipsychotic medications, talk with your doctor about ways you can minimize weight gain and steps you can take to avoid other health conditions that increased weight can produce or aggravate.

As a healthcare consumer, you have a right to be informed about your diagnosis and treatment options. Make sure that you fully understand how different medications may affect you – both their benefits and possible side-effects. Again, learning as much as you can about your illness will help you be active in your recovery.

## Making the Most of Your Time With Your Doctor

You might not have a lot of time during your appointments with your doctor. It can help to plan ahead for any visits or conversations. Here are some tips for effective visits with your doctor:

- **Come prepared.** Note your symptoms, including when you have them. Write out questions before you go in, and either make a list of all medications and dosages you take (including over-the-counter drugs, herbal supplements, vitamins, etc.), or bring your medications with you. The attached wallet card can help you.
- **Complete the Antipsychotic Side-effect Checklist (ASC).** Use ASC and discuss the checklist with your doctor or another healthcare provider, such as a nurse or social worker, who works with your doctor.
- **Be honest.** Telling the truth about how you're feeling helps your healthcare providers treat your problem. Don't say, "I'm fine" when you're not! Your doctor can't help you when he or she doesn't know about the problem.
- **Ask questions.** Raise all of your concerns. You have a right to full information about your diagnosis and treatment.
- **Take notes.** This will be helpful during your visit if you have trouble remembering details. It also helps to bring along a friend or family member to take notes.
- **Check your doctor's availability.** Find out your doctor's availability and what you should do if you have any problems between visits. Identify a contact person at your doctor's office for additional questions when your doctor is not available.
- **Follow-up with your doctor.** If you have concerns about your treatment side-effects and the recovery process, your doctor may refer you to another mental healthcare provider.
- **Talk to your doctor about your recovery process.** Let your doctor know what else is going on in your life that may be helping or hurting you in your recovery. Talk about where you want to be in your recovery. Your doctor will want to help!



Keep this wallet card on hand to help you and your doctor build a *Dialogue for Recovery*.

For additional wallet cards, contact NMHA at 800-969-NMHA (6642)



# Antipsychotic Side-effects Checklist (ASC)

## A Tool for Facilitating Dialogue between Patients and Mental Healthcare Providers

ASC is a "checklist" of common and distressing side-effects associated with antipsychotic medication. Go through each question and check (✓) yes or no depending on whether you are experiencing the side-effect. Write your questions for your doctor under the "comments" section. You may fill this out yourself or together with your healthcare provider.

Problem	Yes	No	Comments
<b>1. Loss of energy and drive:</b> Have you had trouble moving, getting going, or starting things? Do you feel slowed down?	_____	_____	_____ _____ _____
<b>2. Feeling unmotivated or numb:</b> Have you had trouble getting motivated or wanting to do the things you used to? (Sometimes people describe this as "feeling like a zombie.")	_____	_____	_____ _____ _____
<b>3. Daytime sedation or drowsiness:</b> Are you tired or sleepy during the day? Feelings of tiredness can happen throughout the day or only at certain times.	_____	_____	_____ _____ _____
<b>4. Sleeping too much:</b> Do you sleep too much? Do you feel you sleep for too long? Do you have a problem getting out of bed in the morning, or do you need to go back to sleep for a large part of the day?	_____	_____	_____ _____ _____
<b>5. Muscles being too tense or stiff:</b> Do your muscles feel stiff or rigid? Do you feel cramps or muscle pains in the arms, legs, or neck?	_____	_____	_____ _____ _____
<b>6. Muscles trembling or shaking:</b> Have you had any shaking or muscle-trembling?	_____	_____	_____ _____ _____
<b>7. Feeling restless or jittery:</b> Have you had any feelings of restlessness? Do you ever feel like you want to "jump out of your skin"?	_____	_____	_____ _____ _____
<b>8. Need to move around and pace; can't sit still:</b> Do you often need to get up and pace around? Do you have trouble sitting still? Do you rock from one leg to the other?	_____	_____	_____ _____ _____
<b>9. Trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep (insomnia):</b> Do you have trouble falling asleep or getting to sleep when you want to? Do you wake up during the night, or wake up too early in the morning?	_____	_____	_____ _____ _____

Problem

Yes

No

Comments

**10. Blurry vision:**

Do you have blurry vision? Things may seem out of focus. People with blurred vision may have trouble with reading printed words in newspapers.

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**11. Dry mouth:**

Is your mouth too dry? Does it feel like you have cotton in your mouth? Does it seem like your tongue sticks to the top of your mouth?

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**12. Drooling:**

Do you have too much saliva (spit)? Is your pillow wet when you wake up?

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**13. Memory and concentration:**

Do you have any memory problems? Are you more forgetful? Is it hard to concentrate? Do you find it hard to follow conversations, watch programs on TV, or read?

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**14. Constipation:**

Do you have problems with constipation?

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**15. Weight change:**

Have you had any changes in weight? Do you feel that you are overweight? Do you gain weight quickly, or cannot seem to go on a diet? Are your clothes getting too big or too small for you?

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**16. Changes in sexual functioning:**

Do you have any sexual problems or difficulties? Sometimes people say they have problems with low sex drive. Some men say that they have difficulties with erections or ejaculation, and some women say that they have difficulty achieving orgasm.

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**17. Menstrual or breast problems:**

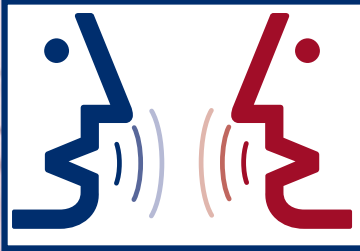
If you should have regular menstrual periods, have you had any menstrual problems lately? Sometimes women stop having their normal periods, or have irregular periods. Have you had this problem recently? Sometimes there may be milk leakage from the breasts.

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*Dialogue*  
for Recovery

For more information or to obtain additional *Dialogue for Recovery* materials, please contact your local Mental Health Association, or

National Mental Health Association  
1021 Prince Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
800-969-NMHA (6642)  
[www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)



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