

What to Do If You Want to Take a Break From Medication

Objective

To decide whether you will take a break from your psychiatric medications.

What to Know

If you have been taking psychiatric medications for a while, you might wonder what would happen if you took a break. Perhaps you believe your medications are not working, and you may even be tempted to stop taking one or more of your medications altogether. "Medication holidays" are intentional pauses in medication. Sometimes this can help you determine how well a medication is working, as well as reduce unpleasant side effects.

While there are different reasons for wanting to stop taking medication, doctors agree it is never a good idea to do so suddenly and on your own. Suddenly stopping psychiatric medication can cause changes in your biochemistry, so it is essential that any changes you make are planned and gradual. You might experience symptoms like dizziness, fatigue, nausea, ringing ears, or even a "rebound" effect, which is a worsening of your symptoms.

There are, however, some good reasons to take a medication holiday, including experiencing significant side effects.

If you are thinking about taking a break from one or more of your medications, you can follow these steps.

1. Discuss the pros and cons with your treatment team.
2. Keep a diary of physical symptoms, thoughts, and feelings before, during, and after stopping the medication.
3. Be honest with your treatment team about symptoms and any concerns you have.
4. Work closely with your prescribing doctor on options, including increasing or decreasing dosage or changing medications.
5. If you do change medications, make a gradual, monitored change from one medication to the other.
6. Include your loved ones so they can provide your treatment team with additional insights.
7. Decide how you will know if symptoms are returning. Keep a mood graph through the transition.
8. Meet regularly with your therapist to monitor your progress. Update your safety plan as needed.
9. If symptoms return, meet with your doctor as soon as possible to decide how to proceed.

10. Promise yourself you will do what is in your own best interest – even if that means resuming medication.

This worksheet will help you identify what to do if you want to take a break from your psychiatric medications.

What to Do

Answer the following questions, on your own and/or with loved ones and your therapist.

What medication(s) do you want to stop?

What are the pros of taking a break?

What are the cons of taking a break?

Is changing the dose or switching medications an option? Why or why not?

If you stop one or more medications, keep a mood graph throughout the transition. Use the graph on the following page to track your mood each day. Circle the dot with a pen. At the end of the week, connect the dots to see how your mood fluctuated. At the bottom of the graph, write down circumstances that affected your mood.

Week of: _____	Plan	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Not sleeping / psychotic		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Manic / poor judgment		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Hypomanic		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Very anxious		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Energized / hyperactive		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Mild anxiety / worry		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Happy		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Even / stable / neutral mood (not good or bad)		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Low / feeling down		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Sad		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Depressed		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Completely immobilized		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Suicidal		•	•	•	•	•	•	•

What caused your mood shifts?

What actions did you take to manage your moods?

Did you notice changes in energy level or concentration? Describe.

Make a copy of the chart or record the information in your journal or notebook. You may also want to write down physical symptoms, side effects, thoughts, and feelings. Share this notebook with your treatment team and loved ones.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this activity help you decide whether you will take a break from your psychiatric medications? Why or why not?

Was the mood graph helpful? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn in this exercise?
