

# PSYCHOPHARMACOLOGY & ALTERNATIVES FOR MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

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## ISSUE IMPORTANCE

Psychopharmacology is the study of the effects of psychotropic drugs on the mind and behavior. Medication can be a supportive addition to mental health treatment for many. Providers can better support those who use psychiatric medicine by learning more about the science of psychopharmacology and elements of treatment (i.e. the importance of HOW a treatment is administered). Additionally, it is important for providers to remain aware of potential side effects of medications and how they may be misinterpreted as behavior problems.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

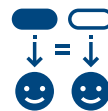
- **Psychopharmacology is largely a social intervention**, meaning that HOW a treatment takes place is important. (Psychotherapy, on the other hand, is actually a biological intervention.)
- A **placebo** is a treatment with a chemically inactive substance that has an effect on an individual.
- Differences in age, sex, biology, history, and more can all impact the efficacy of medications. For these reasons, it often takes several trials for an individual to find what works for them.
- There is research on alternative treatments, medications, and even supplements that may provide support for individuals with mental health conditions.

### ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PSYCHOPHARMACOLOGICAL TREATMENT

Psychopharmacology is largely a social intervention: the way a treatment is administered has a large impact.

The following **elements** are important in the efficacy of psychopharmacological treatment.

- ✓ Display credentials & healing symbols
- ✓ Look professional
- ✓ Perform evaluations, ask questions, and utilize diagnostic tests
- ✓ Take time, be attentive, take notes
- ✓ Inspire confidence
- ✓ Outline diagnosis, prognosis, and plausible treatment
- ✓ See patient more than once and/ or suggest regular appointments



### THE PLACEBO EFFECT

A placebo is a treatment with a *chemically inactive* substance that *produces an effect*.

Placebos have successfully treated depression, pain, asthma, arthritis, hypertension, warts, colitis, insomnia, and other conditions.

Most studies comparing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to pill placebo show no difference.

**The placebo effect accounts for up to 73% of the response to antidepressants.**

- Panic disorder is highly responsive to placebos: 50% improvement in symptoms.
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Generalized Anxiety Disorder are responsive to placebos, with improvements of 30-40%.
- OCD & psychosis do not show much response.



# COMMON CONDITIONS & MEDICATIONS



## ANXIETY:

- Benzodiazepines are commonly prescribed for anxiety. These medications are all essentially the same. At low doses they relieve anxiety, at higher doses they relax muscles, cause sleepiness, and stop seizures.
- They are extremely safe unless mixed with alcohol or other sedatives. Because they cause euphoria and habituation, they can trigger addictive behavior in vulnerable people.
- They are contraindicated with active prescription misuse, active opioid, alcohol, sedative use disorder, and methadone use.

## ADHD:

- In most, medication does not produce total remission of symptoms; additional interventions should include psychoeducation, behavioral interventions, parent training and school support.
- Stimulant medication is the mainstay treatment for ADHD. Various stimulants seem to be equally effective with ~70% response rate.
  - Methylphenidate: fewer side effects.
  - Amphetamines (like Adderall): more likely to be abused or diverted.
  - Side effects of all stimulants include decreased appetite, initial sleep difficulty, headaches, stomachaches, tics & irritability.
- Nonstimulant options (like Bupropion) may be preferred in those with substance abuse, depression, or intolerance of side effects.

## DEPRESSION:

- For patients with mild to moderate depression, there is no difference in efficacy among proven treatments for depression: psychotherapy, exercise, alternatives, etc.
- Generally, all antidepressants have the same efficacy, although individuals' responses may be greater to one antidepressant.
- Symptom profile recommendations:
  - for anxiety, irritability → try SSRIs
  - for insomnia, poor appetite → try Mirtazapine
  - for lethargy, poor concentration, and smoking cessation → Bupropion



## THE BOTTOM LINE & SUPPLEMENTS



- ✓ Get your B vitamins.
- ✓ Try Omega 3s from fish oil.
- ✓ Get carotenoids from food, not supplements.
  - ✓ Quit smoking!
  - ✓ Get vitamin E from your diet.
- ✓ Get magnesium, from a multivitamin if necessary.
- ✓ Cut down on salt.



- ✓ Calcium and vitamin D work together. Most of us need more vitamin D; consider supplements.
- ✓ Women should consider taking calcium supplements or a calcium-rich diet.
- ✓ Too much preformed vitamin A can interfere with bone formation.



- ✓ Make sure you get your minimum B vitamins.
- ✓ Get lots of vitamin E in your diet.
- ✓ Omega 3 fatty acids may support brain and mental health.



Prioritize the following:

- ✓ Carotenoids
- ✓ Zinc
- ✓ Vitamin C



### Cancer Prevention:

- ✓ Get folic acid.
- ✓ Get 1,000 IU of vitamin D every day.
- ✓ Get carotenoids from food like tomatoes.
- ✓ Selenium from a multivitamin may be helpful.
- ✓ Men should avoid calcium supplements.



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