

# HEALTH & SAFETY: PSYCHIATRIC MEDICATIONS

## “SSRIs and SNRIs”

*BQIS/Outreach Fact Sheets provide a general overview on topics important to supporting an individual’s health and safety and to improving their quality of life. This is the fifth of six Fact Sheets regarding Psychotropic Medications.*

### Objectives

Individuals will understand why SSRIs or SNRIs are prescribed, how they work, common side effects, occasional side effects, serious side effects and how the physician monitors this medicine.

### Definitions

**Selective Serotonin Re-uptake Inhibitors (SSRIs):** A class of medications that affect the activity of serotonin.

**Serotonin and Norepinephrine Re-uptake Inhibitors (SNRIs):** A class of medications that affect the activity of serotonin and norepinephrine.

**Serotonin:** A hormone found in various locations of the body including the brain that acts both as a chemical messenger that transmits nerve signals between nerve cells, and that causes blood vessels to narrow.

**Norepinephrine:** a chemical responsible for moving nerve impulses between neurons. It also acts as a stress hormone and plays a role in a person’s fight-or-flight response. In this role, it increases a person’s heart rate and blood flow to the muscles; it also stimulates the release of blood sugar and is often compared to adrenaline.

### Facts

- SSRIs and SNRIs medications include: (Prozac (fluoxetine), Zoloft (sertraline), Paxil (paroxetine), Luvox (fluvoxamine), Lexapro (escitalopram), Celexa (citalopram), Cymbalta (duloxetine), Effexor (venlafaxine), Pristiq (desvenlafaxine))
- SSRIs and SNRIs are available in:
  - Liquid (depending on medication)
  - Tablets (depending on medication)

- These medicines work by:
  - Decreasing mood swings
  - Decreasing depression
  - Decreasing anxiety
- Common side effects include (may decrease after several weeks):
  - Weight gain or weight loss
  - Upset stomach, nausea, vomiting
  - Diarrhea
  - Headaches
  - Anxiety/agitation/restlessness or nervousness
  - Tremors
  - Sedation
  - Insomnia
  - Dizziness
  - Increased sweating
  - Difficulty with sexual functioning
- Occasional side effects (call the physician within several week):
  - Frequent yawning
  - Blurred vision
  - Fatigue
- Occasional but serious side effects (call the physician that day):
  - New or increase in suicidal thoughts
  - Decreased need for sleep, talking fast, feeling very excited or irritable
  - Increase in blood pressure or heart rate
- Very rare but extremely serious side effects (Need to go to the ER immediately):
  - Seizures
  - Restlessness with confusion, shaking or jerking, sweating or the skin turning red
- How the physician monitors these medicines:
  - Checking for a past history or family history of mania
  - Checking pulse rate and blood pressure at each visit

## Recommended Actions and Prevention Strategies

1. Administer medications as prescribed
2. Watch for anything different/change in status about the person and for signs and symptoms of side effects of medications
3. Document noted signs and symptoms of side effects of medications and changes in status of the person

4. Communicate noted signs and symptoms of side effects of medications and changes in status of the person to supervisor/nurse immediately
5. Seek medical attention as indicated according to the seriousness of symptoms as listed above
6. Monitor for effectiveness of medication by documenting target behavior data that relate to diagnosis

## Learning Assessment

Questions that can be used to verify a person's competency in the material contained in this Fact Sheet:

1. SSRIs and SNRIs are used to decrease:
  - A. Depression
  - B. Anxiety
  - C. Mood swings
  - D. All of the above
2. Common side effects of SSRIs/SNRIs include:
  - A. Headaches
  - B. Muscle twitching
  - C. Seizures
  - D. Hair Loss
3. Occasional side effects of SSRIs/SNRIs include:
  - A. Blurred vision
  - B. Confusion
  - C. Trouble speaking
  - D. Nausea
4. Serious side effects of SSRI/SNRIs include:
  - A. Suicidal ideation
  - B. Irritability
  - C. Bed-wetting
  - D. Hair loss

## References

- Dulcan MK (editor). Helping Parents, Youth, and Teachers Understand Medications for Behavioral and Emotional Problems: A Resource Book of Medication Information Handouts, Third Edition. Washington, DC, American Psychiatric Publishing, 2007
- Stahl SM. Essential Psychopharmacology: The Prescriber's Guide. Cambridge, UK, The Press Syndicate of The University of Cambridge, 2005
- Craig A. Erickson, M.D. Assistant Professor of Psychiatry; Chief, Fragile X Syndrome Clinic Indiana University School of Medicine; Riley Hospital Child & Adolescent Psychiatry Clinic

## Related Resources

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry [www.aacap.org/cs/forFamilies](http://www.aacap.org/cs/forFamilies)

National Institute of Mental Health [nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/mental-health-medications/complete-index.shtml](http://nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/mental-health-medications/complete-index.shtml)

Psychiatric Medication Series Fact Sheets: “Atypical Antipsychotics”, “Typical Antipsychotics”, “Depakote”, “Lithium”, and “Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome”

## Learning Assessment Answers

1. D
2. A
3. A
4. A

## Outreach Services

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