

Talking to Your Doctors about

# Mental Health

# MEDICATIONS

**If you take an antidepressant or anti-anxiety medication, or any other mental health medication, you're not alone.**

Studies show that more than 121 million adults worldwide will suffer from depression or anxiety during their lifetimes, and more than 32 million people in the US alone will experience an episode of Major Depression—an illness that cuts across socioeconomic and cultural barriers and affects people of all genders, races, ethnicities and incomes. The World Health Organization has found that depression is the number one cause of disability worldwide, and that it takes a bigger toll on overall health than chronic diseases like angina, arthritis, asthma and even diabetes. The WHO also found that for people who were already sick, having depression made the illness worse.



Fortunately, there are effective treatments for depression and anxiety. Given the prevalence and impact of this condition, it may not be surprising that the top 20 prescriptions written in the US include no fewer than six mental health medications! So you have probably at least heard of Paxil, Lexapro, Zoloft, Cymbalta, Wellbutrin or other psychiatric medications. More than just a popular fad, these medications represent significant advances in science and medicine that have allowed millions of people to be safely and effectively treated for a variety of difficult mental health conditions.

While medications and psychotherapy have been shown to be effective treatments for depression, studies have shown that fewer than 25 percent of those affected receive treatment. People with chronic or debilitating medical conditions, like obesity, are especially susceptible to episodes of depression and anxiety. If you are more than 100 pounds overweight, it's critical for you to talk to your doctor about any periods of sadness or anxiety you might have, to be aware of treatment options, and to really understand both the nature and the effects of any medications you've been prescribed. If you are considering weight loss surgery or have already undergone surgery, there are special considerations of which you, your doctor and your surgeon will want to be aware.

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR DIAGNOSIS AND YOUR MEDICATION

If you are diagnosed with depression, anxiety or another mental health condition, it's important for you to understand how common these conditions are and to learn what you can about both your diagnosis and your treatment options. Your best bet for accurate information is talking with your doctor. He or she should be able to help you understand your condition, your treatment alternatives, and the expected course of your recovery.

Sometimes it helps to come prepared with questions to ask your treating clinician. Doing a little online research about your condition

can help you understand which questions to ask: sources like webmd.com, drugs.com, and psychologytoday.com all have diagnosis dictionaries and links to resources that can help. However, use caution when getting information from the Internet, as not all sites and resources are as reliable and data-driven as those listed above, and there is plenty of misinformation about mental health and treatment options online. Again, your best bet is to do some reading beforehand and then bring it in to discuss with your doctor for better understanding and clarification.

In addition to helping you understand your diagnosis, your doctor should share with you information about the risks, benefits and possible side effects of any treatment option he or she is recommending, as well as alternative treatment options. If your doctor is recommending a mental health medication as part of your treatment plan, be sure you get the following information:

- What is the name of the medication, and what is it supposed to do?
- How and when do I take it (time of day, with or without meals, with or without other medications), and what happens if I accidentally miss a dose?
- How long should I expect it to take for the medication to take effect?
- What foods, drinks or other medications should I avoid while taking the prescribed medication?
- Is it safe to drink alcohol or drive while on this medication?
- What are the common side effects, and what should I do if they occur?
- How long should I expect to be on the medication?
- Is this a medication that is safe to abruptly discontinue?
- Are there any risks of becoming tolerant to or dependent on this medication?
- (If you are a WLS patient) Does weight loss surgery create any issues with absorption of this medication that I need to be aware of?

## MENTAL HEALTH MEDS AND WEIGHT LOSS SURGERY

If you are one of the many patients who are taking a psychiatric medication and preparing for WLS, it is critical to tell your surgeon about all of your medications so that you can be appropriately monitored before, during and after surgery.

Deciding to have WLS is an important step in regaining your health and vitality. You will need close monitoring by your physician both pre-op and post-op, to be sure that the amount of medication you are taking is appropriate for your needs. With many mental health medicines, it is very important that you take your medications exactly as prescribed. Suddenly stopping some medications can be dangerous, and you and your doctor need to be on the same page to make sure you have the very best pre-op and post-op experience possible.

Depending on the type of WLS you will or have had, there are several important things for you to know and discuss with your doctor. Specific concerns include:

- The reduced size of your stomach after surgery can increase the risk of gastrointestinal problems.
- Decreased intestinal length and surface area in people who have had gastric bypass can lead to the reduced absorption of extended-release, delayed-release and film-coated medications.

To overcome this problem, the immediate-release dosage forms should be used instead and dosing should occur more frequently. In addition, drugs that are rapidly and primarily absorbed in the stomach or duodenum are likely to be less effective in gastric bypass patients. Nearly all medications come in an oral form, and this form of a medication might be right for you depending on your surgery type.

## HOW TO TALK TO YOUR SURGEON: MEDICATION DISCUSSION CHECKLIST

If you've already had or are considering having WLS and are being prescribed a psychiatric medication for the first time, make sure to review the following questions with your doctor:

- How will the absorption of my medications be changed by surgery?
- How will we monitor the effectiveness of my medications?
- If my medication comes in an oral form, should we use that instead?
- How will you handle giving me medications before, during and after my surgery?
- Will the anesthesiologist be made aware of my medications and take these into account when planning for my surgery?
- Is there anything I can do to increase the effectiveness or absorption of my medication?
- Will the dosing of my medicine change after surgery?

## ON THE RIGHT PATH

Remember that getting the help you need for obesity and getting the help you need for mental health conditions are two very important steps in the right direction. Both can significantly improve your quality of life and your overall health. However, both require close vigilance and observation by your treating physician and surgeon to ensure your continued health and well-being, both mentally and physically. Having frank discussions with your doctors and asking the right questions will help you and your physicians keep you on the path toward a long, healthy and happy life!



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