

## Coping with the side-effects of medication<sup>i</sup>

All medications have unwanted effects. These vary from person to person and depend on the type of drug and dose being given. Sometimes the side effects disappear after a few days or weeks. Other side effects are more troublesome and persistent. It is very important to report any unwanted effects the medication seems to be having to your doctor. The unpleasant effects can often be got rid of, made less severe or made more tolerable by making some simple changes.

Changes your doctor may suggest include:

- changing to a different medication
- decreasing the dose
- taking the medication in several, smaller doses spread through the day
- taking the medication with appropriate food
- taking extra medication to counteract the side effects.

In addition, things that you can do yourself to deal with side effects include:

Side-effect	Strategy for coping with it
<b>Appetite</b> (increase)	Eat a diet that is low in fat and high in fibre Avoid sugary or fatty foods Drink low calorie soft drinks
<b>Constipation</b>	Increase exercise Increase fibre in diet Increase fluid intake
<b>Dizziness</b>	Get up slowly from lying or sitting Avoid excessively hot showers or baths Avoid alcohol, sedatives or other sedating drugs (eg marijuana)
<b>Drowsiness</b>	Take medication in a single dose before bedtime (talk to the doctor about this first). If you feel sleepy during the day, you should not drive or work with machinery.
<b>Dry mouth</b>	Drink water regularly throughout the day Limit alcohol and caffeine (both enhance water loss) Use sugarless gums, fruit pastilles and lollies (sugar will promote dental decay) Suck on ice cubes If it is very bad, ask your doctor about artificial saliva (Luborant)
<b>Sensitivity to sunburn</b>	Avoid the midday sun Regularly use sunscreen and wear a hat, sunglasses and shirt Ask your doctor for a prescription for sunscreen

For more detailed information about individual medications telephone the Mental Health Drugs Helpline. This helpline is run by the UK Psychiatric Pharmacy Group, staffed by experienced mental health pharmacists and provides independent advice and information about drugs to patients and carers. Tel: 020 7919 2999 11 am-5 pm Monday to Friday, excluding Bank Holidays. You can also contact MIND, 15-19 Broadway, London, E15 4BQ, Tel: 020 8519 2122 for a copy of their booklets 'Making Sense of treatments and drugs'.

<sup>i</sup> Adapted from Andrews G and Jenkins R, eds, 1999, *Management of Mental Disorders (UK Edition)* World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Mental Health and Substance Abuse