

Is Medication Necessary?

Often clients wonder if medication is "necessary" or "advisable" in their recovery from emotional distress. Needless to say, opinions about this may range the entire spectrum from *medications are never advisable* to *recovery is not possible without them*. The question itself is complex enough to require a whole host of details about each particular person. Because of this, questions about medication need to be addressed very carefully with medical professionals and allied health professionals you trust and who know you well. With the advent of direct marketing and advertising to consumers about medications, the public is being "invited", as it were, to participate in greater measure regarding choosing medications which may enhance their quality of life.

Below are some conclusions I have arrived at working with physicians and patients regarding psychotropic medications.

- 1. DO expect medications to be adjusted.** Prescribing medications is not always an exact science - trial, error, and adjustment are sometimes necessary. Because each person's body chemistry is unique, different though similar types of medication may need to be tried. Different potency and dosage ranges allow medications to be titrated up or down. Persons expecting a *perfect hit or I quit* approach to medications are only fooling themselves.
- 2. DON'T expect medications to necessarily work immediately.** Unlike television commercials for pain relievers that promote a magic bullet approach to pain relief, some psychotropic medications require several days for significant symptomatic changes to be observed.
- 3. DO understand that medications are *tools* to assist in recovery, not an end in themselves.** Taking medication is not a weakness or failure. Medication is a chosen tool used by someone to manage a particular condition or symptom. Research suggests, for example, that the best treatment for depression is the right combination of medication and type of counseling. Not only does the underlying physical basis of depression need treated (brain chemistry), the cognitive and behavioral components of depression which can exacerbate a depressive episode also need addressed ([click here to see my article on Managing Anxiety and Depression](#)).
- 4. DO take medications consistently and as prescribed.** While it may seem inconvenient (and costly) to take medication, taking them as prescribed and consistently is very important (and cost effective). I have seen persons conclude that their medications are not helpful - but they have only taken them sporadically or inconsistently! The sabotaging of treatment by misuse of medications is, unfortunately, not that uncommon. Avoid stopping medications abruptly without knowledge of your physician - sometimes this can bring about a "rebound effect" and worsening of symptoms. Always consult with your doctor before changing any course of therapy.
- 5. DO recognize that all medications have their own unique side-effect profile.** As you already know, the perfect medication has yet to be developed! Sometimes we must weigh the benefits of using a medication with the side effects caused by that medication. Work closely with your physician to find the best balance between benefits and risks. Side effects are the leading cause of medication non-compliance. Know what side effects are simply annoying vs. those which are significant warning signs. Read medication labels carefully and consult with your pharmacist, physician, and allied health professionals if you have questions or doubts. Using medication is a choice and informed choices are usually the best.

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