

Aripiprazole

Aripiprazole (abilify) can help depression, anxiety, agitation, paranoia and hallucinations. It is one of the best-studied options for helping antidepressants work better in non-bipolar depression (the other good option for this is lithium).

It is beneficial in bipolar mania and mixed states, which are common causes of irritability, agitation, anxiety, insomnia, racing thoughts, distraction and impulsivity.

It belongs to a class of medications called the atypical antipsychotics, which differ widely in their side effects and benefits. Among these medications, aripiprazole stands out for its relative lack of weight gain and fatigue.

Aripiprazole can take up to 2-3 weeks to work fully but can bring benefits after a few days.

How should I take it?

Aripiprazole can be taken once a day with or without food. Aripiprazole's benefits build up gradually in the brain and are not impacted by the time of day you take it. If it makes you drowsy you should take it in the evening, otherwise the effects of the medication are not impacted by the time of day it is taken.

It's a good idea to link the time you take aripiprazole with a daily routine that you already have in place, such as showering or brushing your teeth. Store the medicine near that routine and take it at the same time so you can build on habits you've already developed.

What if I forget a dose?

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember it. However, if it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose and continue your regular dosing schedule. Do not take a double dose to make up for a missed one.

How long do I need to take it?

This depends on your diagnosis and which other medications you are taking. Most people with bipolar disorder need to stay on at least

Key Points

1. Aripiprazole can be taken in the day or night (drowsiness is rare).
2. There are several rare, but serious, side effects with aripiprazole (diabetes, high cholesterol, tardive dyskinesia).
3. If your insurer requires authorization, contact us at auth@moodtreatmentcenter.com if so.

one mood stabilizer for the long term in order to prevent mood swings. If aripiprazole helped, it is best to stay on it for at least 6 months before considering going off it. That gives the brain time to build up habits of stability.

What happens if I stop it?

Aripiprazole is unique in that it comes out of your system gradually (over one week) after stopping it.

Aripiprazole is not addictive and does not cause withdrawal symptoms. If you plan to come off aripiprazole, it is best to do so slowly (over at least 2 weeks) as that will lower the chance of sudden mood swings returning.

Checking labs

It is a good idea to check for diabetes and high cholesterol while taking aripiprazole. This medication, as well as bipolar disorder itself, increases the risk of these conditions.

Side effects

Aripiprazole is generally well tolerated. Weight gain and tiredness are rare. The most common side effects are nausea and an uncomfortable restless feeling called *akathisia*.

If you don't tolerate the medication, try cutting your dose in half until the side effects get better and then raising it up.

These side effects tend to improve with time or by lowering the dose:

Nausea, tiredness, restlessness, muscle aches or stiffness.

As you are starting the medicine, use caution when driving or performing tasks that require alertness. This should not be a problem once you have adjusted to the medicine and know how it affects you.

Rare side effects

Low blood pressure: aripiprazole can cause blood pressure to drop when you stand up (leading to dizziness or falls). You can reduce this risk by standing up slowly.

Elevations of prolactin hormone: this can cause menstrual irregularities and breast milk secretion. We may need to stop aripiprazole or use treatments to lower prolactin if this occurs.

Rare but serious side effects

Metabolic Changes: Aripiprazole can increase the risk of diabetes and high cholesterol. This risk is much lower with aripiprazole than with other atypical antipsychotics.

Tardive Dyskinesia: Extremely rarely, aripiprazole may cause involuntary movements, such as twitching in the face, hands or other muscles. This risk may be greater if you take aripiprazole for many years or have taken older antipsychotics in the past. This condition can be treated but sometimes it is not reversible.

Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome: This syndrome, which is extremely rare on aripiprazole, consists of sudden, severe muscle stiffness, fever and irregular pulse and blood pressure.

Use in Dementia: Aripiprazole can increase the risk of death when used in older adults with dementia. This effect is not seen in people without dementia and may be related to brain-changes that dementia brings.

Pregnancy: Aripiprazole has not been adequately studied in pregnancy. It does pass through breast milk.

Akathisia

This side effect is a feeling of inner restlessness which makes it very uncomfortable to sit still. It is not dangerous and may improve with time or a lower dose.

Akathisia can be relieved with several medications including propranolol, betaxolol, pramipexole, gabapentin, trazodone, mirtazapine and benzodiazepines.

Interactions

Recreational drugs: Alcohol (in excess of 2 glasses/day) and recreational drugs can prevent aripiprazole from working.

Other medications: These web sites help you check for drug interactions. You should talk with us about the information you find as many drug interactions have only a mild effect:

reference.medscape.com/drug-interactionchecker

How to store and dispose of medication

- Keep out of the reach of children.
- Store away from heat, direct light and damp places.
- To safely dispose of unwanted pills: Do not pour in the toilet or sink (it will enter the water supply). To prevent children or pets from eating it, mix unwanted pills in a bag with water and inedible trash (such as coffee grounds) and throw in the garbage.

Cost and insurance coverage

Aripiprazole should become available as a generic in the near future. Please check with your pharmacist to see if prior authorization is required as this may take time for us to arrange with your insurer. We can usually provide samples while we try to secure authorization; contact us at auth@moodtreatmentcenter.com.

There may be coupons at: www.abilify.com.

Quick facts

Brand	Abilify
Dose range	Depression: 2-5mg/day Mania/mixed state: 10-30mg/day Schizophrenia: 10-30mg/day
Sizes	Tabs: 2, 5, 10, 15, 20, 30mg Dispersible tabs: 10, 15mg
Release date	11/15/2002
FDA-approval	Non-bipolar depression (when taken with an antidepressant), bipolar mania and mixed states, schizophrenia, irritability due to autism or asberger syndrome

Comparison of Atypical Antipsychotics

Medication	Unipolar Depression	Bipolar Depression	Mania & Mixed States	Schizophrenia	Irritability due to Autism	OCD	Borderline Personality	Tourette's (muscle tics)	Generic?	Weight Gain	Tiredness
Risperidone (risperdal)	◇		■	■	■	□	□	□	Y	↑	↑
Olanzapine (zyprexa, symbyax)	◆	◆	■	■		□	□	□	Y	↑↑↑	↑↑
Quetiapine (seroquel)	◆	■	■	■		□	□		Y	↑↑	↑↑↑
Ziprasidone (geodon)	◇		■	■				□	Y	—	↑↑
Aripiprazole (abilify)	◆		■	■	■	□	□	□	N	↑	—
Paliperidone (invega)				■		□			N	↑	—
Asenapine (saphris)			■	■					N	↑	↑↑
Lurasidone (latuda)		■	□	■					N	↑	↑
Iloperidone (fanapt)				■					N	↑↑	↑

■ = FDA-approved ◆ = FDA-approved in combination with an antidepressant □ = Effective but not FDA-approved
 Side effects: ↑↑↑ major, ↑↑ moderate, ↑ mild, — rare or none

—Chris Aiken, MD, updated 6/3/2015