

Hypnotics



What are hypnotics?

Hypnotics initiate sleep, which are effective for patients who are unable to achieve or maintain sleep. However, this kind of drugs are reserved for short term use only due to the fact that long term use will develop physical and physiological dependence.

Classes of hypnotics

- 1) Antihistamine
- 2) Sedatives - Benzodiazepine
- 3) Sedatives - Non-Benzodiazepine

Antihistamine

- 1) What are the commonly used antihistamines?
Chlorpheniramine (Piriton)
Promethazine (Phenergan)
- 2) What are the indications of Antihistamine?
To provide symptomatic relief of allergy and cold, e.g. skin itchiness, red and swollen skin, runny nose and sneezing, etc.
- 3) What is the mechanism of action of Antihistamine?
Antihistamines are H1 antagonists, which inhibit effects at several sites such as blood vessels, gastrointestinal tract and respiratory tract.
- 4) What are the side effects of Antihistamine?
Dry mouth, blurred vision, difficulty passing urine and drowsiness. Antihistamine should be used cautiously in patients with glaucoma, prostatic hypertrophy and urinary retention.

Sedatives – Benzodiazepine

- 1) What are the commonly used sedatives?

Benzodiazepine:

Nitrazepam (Mogadon)

Flunitrazepam (Rohypnol)

Midazolam (Dormicum)

- 2) What are their indications?

Apart from treating insomnia, benzodiazepine can be used in a variety of treatments. They are used to treat nervousness and anxiety; therefore they are very effective to treat insomnia associated with anxiety and mood instability.

- 3) What are their mechanisms?

They act on GABA receptors, either increasing or decreasing the concentrations and activities of the neurotransmitters, like GABA, serotonin, noradrenaline, thus inducing sleep.

- 4) What are the side effects?

Dizziness, drowsiness, somnolence, fatigue, body imbalance, loss of memory, difficulty in carrying out voluntary movements, dry mouth, impaired coordination, drugs dependence and withdrawal symptoms, etc. Patients should avoid taking any alcoholic beverages.

This kind of drugs has a high potency to be abused, so patients must comply with doctors' instructions in taking these medications.

Do not discontinue taking medications on your own. Please follow the doctors' instructions to step down the dose gradually, so as to avoid any discomforts and withdrawal symptoms, such as: insomnia, tremor, sweating, etc.

Sedatives – Non-benzodiazepine

- 1) What are the commonly used non-benzodiazepine?

Zolpidem (Stillnox)

Zopiclone (Imovane)

- 2) What are their indications?

For the treatment of insomnia, they act quickly but short duration of action. Hence, making them more suitable for patients who have trouble falling asleep and have a preference for less residual effects the

next day.

3) How do they work?

Their actions are mediated through enhancement of the activity of GABA in the brain, as a consequence to induce sleep.

4) What are their side effects?

Nausea, dizziness, fatigue, gastrointestinal disturbance, headache, confusion and drug dependence and withdrawal, etc.

It appears non-benzodiazepine offers more clinical advantages over benzodiazepine, such as less side effects and smaller risk of being abused. They are only for the short term management of insomnia as chronic use will induce tolerance, dependence and withdrawal symptoms.

If patients experience any undesirable side effects during drug treatment, do not worry and inform your doctors for adjustment.

FAQ

1) May I stop taking my medicine?

It is necessary to take your medicine promptly in order to control your illness. According to scientific research, the rates of relapse increase drastically if one is not taking their medications. If you disregard your condition, your chance of recovery would be lessened.

2) What to do before taking my medication?

Before taking your medication, you must always ensure whether the medicine belongs to you, always follow your doctor's instructions, and those on the pharmacy label. You should never change the prescribed dosage or stop your medication without your doctor's direction. And never take two doses at the same time if you forget to take a dose.

3) How to deal with side effects?

Talk to your doctor if you experience any side effects. Your doctor may adjust the dosage in order to minimize the adverse effects. Do not stop taking your medicine without your doctor's direction.

4) How long do I need to take my medicine?

The duration of therapy varies according to the types and severities of illness. Generally speaking, patients with schizophrenia, particularly those with a history of relapse, need to take their medications for a longer period of time. But if your condition is stable, your doctor may adjust the dosage to the minimal-effective dose to control your illness.

- 5) What should the care-givers do if patients refuse to take their medications?

Do not criticize the patients. Try to find out the underlying reason for their refusal e.g. if the patients experience any undesirable side effects or have any necessary concern about their medications, etc. Encouragement from the family and comprehensive explanation of their drug treatment is crucial. Contact the healthcare professionals if the patients still refuse to take the medications.

DO's

- 1) Follow your doctor's direction.
- 2) Pay attention to the dosage, usage, precaution and side effects of your medications.
- 3) Read the prescription label carefully.
- 4) Understand the method of administration.
- 5) Store your medication properly.
- 6) Take your medication at the same time of day.
- 7) Complete the prescribed course unless otherwise directed.

DON'Ts

- 1) Change the dosage of your medication on your own.
- 2) Stop taking your medication except on your doctor's advice.
- 3) Drink alcohol with your medication.
- 4) Put your medication in other bottle.
- 5) Mix 2 medications in one bottle.
- 6) Take other medication unless directed by your doctor.