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PSYCHIATRY

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PATIENT EDUCATION

Aripiprazole

Abilify / Abilify Maintena / Asimtufii / Aristada / Generic formulations

A guide for adults taking aripiprazole.
Follow the directions on your prescription and your provider's recommendations.

DOSE DEPENDS ON THE CONDITION

TABLETS & INJECTIONS ARE NOT INTERCHANGEABLE

Formulations: Oral tablets, dissolving tablets, liquid, and long-acting injections are available. Injection schedules and the need for temporary oral medication vary by brand.

What it is used for

Aripiprazole is used for schizophrenia, bipolar I disorder, and as an add-on treatment for major depression. Other approved uses and ages depend on the formulation.

Long-acting injections have specific indications and start-up regimens. An oral prescription and an injection are not interchangeable without a plan.

How it works

It partially activates dopamine D2 receptors and affects serotonin receptors. Its action differs from drugs that fully block D2 receptors, but it can still cause restlessness, movement changes, and metabolic effects.

What to expect over time

Some symptoms improve earlier than others. Changes in hallucinations, mood, or organized thinking often develop over several weeks. Track practical goals, such as regular sleep and daily activities, and report side effects or limited benefit.

Taking your medication

- Take oral medication consistently, with or without food. Measure liquid with an appropriate device.
- If you miss a dose, take it when you remember unless it is almost time for the next dose. Then skip it. Do not double a dose.
- If you miss an injection visit, contact the clinic; re-starting may require additional medication.
- Do not stop oral doses after an injection unless your provider has told you when to do so.

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ARIPIPRAZOLE / 02

Side effects and safety

Possible side effects

- Restlessness or an inner urge to move
- Nausea, constipation, or headache
- Sleepiness or difficulty sleeping
- Appetite or weight changes

Keeping track of treatment

Some side effects resolve with time; others may require a change of medication. Discuss persistent or bothersome side effects with your provider.

Expect periodic checks of weight, blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, and movement symptoms. Some changes, such as higher blood sugar, may occur before you feel different.

Report new mouth, tongue, face, or limb movements. Tardive dyskinesia is a movement disorder that can persist after medication is stopped.

Report new urges to gamble, shop, binge eat, or engage in sexual activity that feel difficult to control. A medication change may be needed.

If you take too much

For a suspected overdose, call Poison Control at **1-800-222-1222** immediately, even if you feel well. Call 911 for a seizure, collapse, trouble breathing, or inability to wake.

Before you start

Discuss diabetes, heart-rhythm problems, fainting, seizures, low blood counts, swallowing difficulties, and kidney or liver disease. Antipsychotics increase the risk of death in older adults with dementia-related psychosis.

Discuss pregnancy, pregnancy plans, and breastfeeding with your provider. Treatment decisions should consider both the medication and the condition being treated.

Medicines and interactions

Review all your medications with your provider, including over-the-counter medicines and supplements. Have new medications checked before taking them.

Alcohol, opioids, sleeping pills, and sedating allergy medicines can increase impairment. Blood-pressure medicines may add lightheadedness or falls.

Medicines that affect heart rhythm or dopamine signaling need particular review. Some antibiotics, antifungals, and seizure medicines change antipsychotic levels.

Fluoxetine, paroxetine, bupropion, strong CYP3A inhibitors, and carbamazepine can change exposure. Dose adjustments differ between oral and injection formulations.

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ARIPIPRAZOLE / 03

Living with your treatment

When to get help

Emergency symptoms. Get emergency care for fever with severe muscle stiffness and confusion, a seizure, fainting with an irregular heartbeat, or trouble breathing. Fever and stiffness can signal neuroleptic malignant syndrome, a rare but serious reaction.

Prompt medical advice. Contact your provider promptly for new involuntary movements, trouble swallowing, severe restlessness, or symptoms of high blood sugar such as unusual thirst and frequent urination.

If you feel unsafe or have thoughts of self-harm, call 911 or go to an emergency department.

Your questions answered

Can I stop when I feel better?
Consult with your provider. Continuing treatment may prevent symptoms from returning. Abrupt stopping can cause withdrawal symptoms or a relapse.

What if I cannot sit still?
An inner urge to keep moving can be akathisia, a medication side effect. Tell your provider promptly; it can be mistaken for worsening anxiety.

Everyday tips

Stand up slowly. Avoid driving until you know how the medication affects alertness and coordination.

Stay hydrated and take breaks in hot weather. Some antipsychotics interfere with temperature regulation.

Discuss appetite or weight changes early, and keep scheduled monitoring visits.

Storage and safety

Keep medication in its labeled container, away from excess heat and moisture and out of reach of children and pets. Do not share it. Ask a pharmacy about disposal of unused medication.

Sources

Otsuka: Abilify prescribing information

Educational handout; does not replace your prescription or provider's recommendations.