How to Make the Meds Work for You

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How to Get the Best Results From Bipolar Medication

Drug therapy is a key component in the treatment of the bipolar disorder. If you suffer from this condition, you probably tried a few medications suggested by your doctor with variable results. So are the results from bipolar medication negative or positive?

Is there a drug that works for everyone? No, each individual uniquely expresses this condition and will also respond to various meds differently. If you learn a few things about the drugs, you may be able to work with your doctor and find the best option for you.

Getting the Most out of Your Medications

1. Avoid taking antidepressant drugs alone, which are typically used to treat depression and anxiety. They may help with your depressive mood but can aggravate or trigger a manic episode. Your doctor will first consider a mood stabilizer drug, such as lithium, and possibly add an antidepressant later.
2. Many mood stabilizers are available nowadays from lithium to anticonvulsants drugs such as valproic acid, divalproex, lamotrigine and asenapine. They can all help you. Your doctor may choose one, and if you don't respond optimally (or develop side effects), may switch to another one. Other classes of drugs (i.e. antipsychotic drugs or benzodiazepines) can also be added to the treatment plan.
3. Research studies such as a 2003 review featured in "Advances of psychiatric treatment" show that adding psychotherapy to bipolar drugs (especially lithium) is effective and prevents future relapses better than drugs alone. Therefore, ask your doctor to refer you to a psychotherapist, and follow the therapy as recommended.

Other Considerations

Even if you feel better, continue to take your meds and psychotherapy plan. If you stop the drugs suddenly, you will likely experience severe relapses.

Anytime when your doctor changes the medication, ask him/her the following questions: what side effects or warnings that are associated with this drug? How and when should I take the medication? Does it interfere with foods or other medications? When should I see the results?

See your doctor ASAP if you experience suicidal thoughts, extreme changes in your mood, sleep or energy, if you develop side effects from a drug, if you need surgery including extensive dental procedures), or if you become pregnant.