Atypical antipsychotics have mostly replaced the older ‘typical’ antipsychotics for treating schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and other severe mental illness. Typical antipsychotics are more likely to cause adverse effects, particularly extrapyramidal symptoms.

Atypical antipsychotics include amisulpride, aripiprazole, olanzapine, paliperidone, quetiapine, risperidone, and ziprasidone. Clozapine is also an atypical antipsychotic which has a specific adverse reaction profile and higher risks associated with its use (visit www.saferx.co.nz to view the clozapine bulletin for more information).

There is a great variability of individual response with all antipsychotics. In general, start at a low dose and carefully titrate upwards; adverse effects are often dose-related. Combinations should be avoided (unless during switching) due to the increased risk of adverse effects.

Some adverse effects require careful monitoring and management, and some can be serious such as diabetes, stroke and cardiac death. Be cautious when prescribing these medicines to older adults, and people with cardiovascular risk factors such as obesity, diabetes or high cholesterol.

**MANAGE METABOLIC SYNDROME**

An increase in body weight, hyperglycaemia and type 2 diabetes have been observed in people taking atypical antipsychotics. The risk is greatest with clozapine and olanzapine, but cases have also been reported with risperidone and quetiapine. The risk of metabolic syndrome appears to be lower with amisulpride, ziprasidone and aripiprazole.

Provide advice about diet and lifestyle interventions, monitor for the emergence of diabetes and check lipid levels regularly.

**MONITOR FOR ADVERSE EFFECTS AND MANAGE EARLY**

**CARDIOVASCULAR EFFECTS**

Typical and atypical antipsychotics have an increased risk of sudden cardiac death and stroke; everyone taking these medicines should have an annual cardiovascular disease risk assessment. People with at high risk of cardiovascular disease may require an ECG prior to initiating treatment.

Atypical antipsychotics can prolong the QT interval and lead to ventricular tachyarrhythmias particularly with ziprasidone and to a lesser extent with risperidone and aripiprazole. Tachycardia has been observed with risperidone, olanzapine, quetiapine. Postural hypotension can occur with risperidone, olanzapine and quetiapine.

**Movement disorders**

Typical antipsychotics should never be prescribed to people with Parkinson’s disease and atypicals should be used very cautiously. Higher doses of risperidone and amisulpride are associated with Parkinson-like adverse effects. Risperidone, amisulpride, aripiprazole and olanzapine may cause akathisia (including agitation and restlessness).

Atypical antipsychotics are less likely to cause tardive dyskinesia, but it can occur in up to 3% of people taking risperidone and can be irreversible.

**Sexual dysfunction**

Sexual dysfunction is one of the main causes of non-adherence to antipsychotic medicines, especially with Risperidone. Dose reduction or switching medicines may be necessary. The antipsychotic medicines with the lowest risk of sexual dysfunction appear to be aripiprazole, ziprasidone and quetiapine.

**Other side effects**

Anticholinergic effects such as constipation and blurred vision can occur particularly with clozapine and olanzapine. Sedation has been associated with clozapine, olanzapine and quetiapine. Mood or behaviour changes (eg, anxiety, irritability, in extreme cases suicidal thoughts and self-harm) can occur with people taking these medicines; advise them and their caregivers to report any concerns.
ATYPICAL ANTIPSYCHOTICS

UNDERSTAND THAT THERE ARE SOME POTENTIALLY SERIOUS ADVERSE EFFECTS

Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome (NMS)

This is a rare but potentially fatal adverse effect of all antipsychotic medicines. It is more common in young men taking higher doses and is often associated with hot weather and exercise. Symptoms include muscular rigidity, pyrexia, confusion, urinary incontinence, disorientation, tachycardia and sweating. Patients require urgent assessment, the medicine stopped and supportive treatment provided. All antipsychotics are associated with raised hepatic enzymes and blood dyscrasias. Arrange blood counts if unexplained infection or fever develops.

TAKE CARE WITH BEHAVIOURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS OF DEMENTIA (BPSD)

There is an increased risk of mortality and an increased risk of stroke in people with dementia who are prescribed antipsychotic medicines. Older people are also more susceptible to postural hypotension, hyperthermia and hypothermia. Initiate treatment with half the adult dose or less and review for the emergence of adverse effects regularly.

OFF-LABEL PRESCRIBING

Atypical antipsychotics are frequently prescribed for anxiety, and have also been used for sedation and post traumatic stress disorder. These indications are ‘off-label’ so the prescriber needs to discuss the decision to prescribe with the patient (and their family), obtain consent and document this in the patient’s notes. Be aware that there is still limited documented evidence to support off-label use.

KEY REFERENCES


CLICK HERE FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON ATYPICAL ANTISYCHOTICS AND A FULL REFERENCE LIST

MONITORING RECOMMENDATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Blood Count</td>
<td>Initially then annually</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urea and Electrolytes</td>
<td>Initially then annually</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver Function Test</td>
<td>Initially then annually</td>
<td>Not required for amisulpride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lipid profile</td>
<td>Initially, at 3 months and annually</td>
<td>Clozapine or olanzapine, monitor every 3 months for the first year, then annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td>Initially, regularly during first 3 months, then annually</td>
<td>Clozapine or olanzapine, monitor every 3 months for the first year, then annually</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fasting Blood Glucose</td>
<td>Initially, at 4-6 months, then annually</td>
<td>Clozapine or olanzapine, also test after</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECG</td>
<td>Initially if risk factors</td>
<td>Refer to individual datasheets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blood Pressure</td>
<td>Initially and during dose titration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prolactin</td>
<td>Initially, at 6 months, then annually if clinical concerns</td>
<td>For higher risk medicines (amisulpride, risperidone) or if clinical concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVD Risk Assessment</td>
<td>Annually</td>
<td>For everyone with schizophrenia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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