

Association Between Antipsychotic Medicines and Diabetes

For nearly 50 years, antipsychotic medicines have been used to treat mental illnesses. Initially, this class of medications was developed to treat schizophrenia, but today, these drugs are also used to treat agitation associated with Alzheimer’s disease, bipolar disorder, and obsessive–compulsive tendencies. There are 2 categories of antipsychotic drugs: typical and atypical. The difference between the 2 types is largely based upon the brain proteins, or receptors, to which these medicines bind.

As long ago as the 1960s, an association between use of antipsychotics and development of diabetes was noted. Diabetes is a long-term disease in which the body does not properly control



the amount of sugar in the blood. As a result, the level of sugar in the blood is too high. It is possible that antipsychotic drugs themselves influence blood sugar control in an unhealthy manner. It is also possible that individuals with mental illnesses are more likely to have unhealthy lifestyles that contribute to diabetes, such as eating meals or snacks that are high in fat or not getting enough exercise.

A recent study used medical records from a large population of people in Israel—about 3.7 million individuals—to determine whether there were groups most at risk for developing diabetes after being prescribed antipsychotic drugs. In this study, 5 age groupings were defined: 0–24 years, 25–44 years, 45–54 years, 55–64 years, and 65 years or older.

EXAMPLES OF ANTIPSYCHOTIC MEDICATIONS

| Typical Antipsychotics | Atypical Antipsychotics |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Chlorpromazine | Aripiprazole (Abilify) |
| Fluphenazine (Prolixin) | Clozapine (Clozaril) |
| Haloperidol (Haldol) | Olanzapine (Zyprexa) |
| Perphenazine (Trilafon) | Quetiapine (Seroquel) |
| Thioridazine (Mellaril) | Risperidone (Risperdal) |
| Thiothixine (Navane) | Ziprasidone (Geodon) |

Of more than 3.7 million individuals in the database, just over 2% of them were taking antipsychotic medications. The risk of developing diabetes was higher in young people (0–54 years of age) who were prescribed antipsychotic medications, but the association was less apparent in older people. In older individuals, there was no evidence that antipsychotic medications increased the risk of developing diabetes.

If you take antipsychotic medications, you and your doctor should monitor your blood sugar closely. This recommendation is even more important if you are young, because the longer your diabetes is poorly controlled, the greater your risk of developing diabetes-related complications in your kidneys, nerves, feet, and eyes.

Having diabetes can also put you at a higher risk for heart disease, skin conditions, digestive problems, sexual dysfunction, and problems with your teeth and gums.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

National Institute of Mental Health
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/medications/complete-publication.shtml>

National Institute on Mental Health Issues
<http://www.nami.org>