

Antipsychotic Drugs for Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder: What You Should Know

What are antipsychotic drugs?

Antipsychotics are prescription drugs used to treat schizophrenia. They can also be used—along with other drugs—to help treat bipolar disorder.

The exact causes of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder are not fully known. However, they are linked to changes in chemicals in the brain that influence behavior, mood, and thinking. Antipsychotics work by affecting these chemicals.

Antipsychotic drugs do not help everyone.

Schizophrenia is a brain disorder that makes it hard to pay attention, interact with other people, and tell the difference between what is real and what is not real. Unfortunately, antipsychotic drugs won't help about one out of every five people with schizophrenia who take them. Another one in three to four people only get a limited benefit. And for those who respond best, their symptoms are usually only reduced by about half.

Bipolar disorder is marked by sharp swings between feeling very good (manic) and feeling very low (depressed). When used for a short time, antipsychotics help 50 to 75 percent of people with bipolar disorder have fewer symptoms of mania.

Antipsychotic drugs can have serious side effects.

Most people who take antipsychotic drugs have one or more side effects. These can include blurred vision, dizziness, drowsiness, dry mouth, muscle stiffness or weakness, restlessness, sexual problems, spasms and tremors, and weight gain.



Antipsychotic drugs can help people with schizophrenia lead more stable lives and spend less time in a hospital.

More serious side effects can include diabetes, a higher risk for heart disease and stroke, seizures, and a drop in the number of white blood cells that fight infection. Side effects can ease or go away with time, but many people stop taking the drugs because of side effects.

Antipsychotic drugs are expensive.

There are two generations of antipsychotic drugs: the first-generation, or older antipsychotics, and the second-generation, or “atypical” antipsychotics. Many of the older drugs are available as generics, so they are relatively inexpensive. The newer drugs can be very expensive. Only two—clozapine and risperidone—come as generics.

Our advice:

For schizophrenia: In general, almost everyone who is diagnosed with schizophrenia should try an antipsychotic drug. If one drug does not work, they should try another. Many people have to try two or three drugs before they find the right one.

We compared cost, safety, and how well the antipsychotic drugs work, and chose these four as *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*:

-  Clozapine (generic)
-  Olanzapine (Zyprexa)
-  Perphenazine (generic)
-  Risperidone (generic)

For bipolar disorder: Lithium is the standard treatment for bipolar disorder. Carbamazepine and valproic acid are also widely used. An antipsychotic drug can be used with these drugs during a manic period. However, we do not recommend any of the antipsychotic drugs as a *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drug*. There have not been enough studies to show that one drug is better than another for bipolar disorder.

Antipsychotic Drugs: Drug Comparison Chart*

Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs are in blue. We recommend these drugs because they work as well and are as safe as the other drugs, and they cost less.

Our analysis is based on a scientific review by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. This is a summary of a longer, more detailed report you can find at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org.

Best Buy	Generic Name & Strength	Brand Name ^A	Pills per Day ^B	Average Cost per Month ^C	Recommended Use
	Aripiprazole 10 mg tablet	Abilify	One	\$589	
	Clozapine 100 mg tablet	Generic	Three	\$279	For people with moderate to severe schizophrenia when two or more other antipsychotic drugs have not worked.
	Olanzapine 10 mg tablet	Zyprexa	One	\$548	For people who have not responded to perphenazine or have had intolerable side effects.
	Perphenazine 2 mg tablet	Generic	Three	\$75	For people who are not satisfied with their treatment or are new to antipsychotic drugs.
	Quetiapine 100 mg tablet	Seroquel	Three	\$549	
	Risperidone 1 mg tablet	Generic	Two	\$256	For people who have not responded to perphenazine or have had intolerable side effects.
	Ziprasidone 20 mg capsule	Geodon	Two	\$538	

* Due to space limitations, this chart does not list all antipsychotic drugs. For a more complete list, see the full report at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org.

^A “Generic” indicates that this drug is sold under its generic name.

^B Depending on your health conditions, symptoms, and response to the medicine, your doctor may adjust your dose to be either higher or lower than what is stated in this price chart.

^C Prices are based on nationwide average retail prices for May 2009. *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* obtained prices from data provided by Source Healthcare Analytics, LLC., which is not involved in our analysis or recommendations.