

## **What Caregivers Need to Know About the Use of Antipsychotic Drugs in Nursing Homes**

As someone who cares for a friend or family member in a nursing home you need to know about the potential risks of antipsychotic drugs. Antipsychotic drugs are frequently used to address the behavioral issues caused by dementia, including aggression, agitation and delirium.

Because antipsychotic drugs can pose major health risks to older adults, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has a national initiative to reduce the use of antipsychotic medications in nursing facilities. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires many of these drugs to have a “black box” warning on their labels after finding that antipsychotic drugs are increasing death rates in older nursing home residents with dementia.

### **What is a black box warning?**

A black box warning means that the drug carries a major risk of serious or even life-threatening effects. The FDA requires the warning on packaging for certain prescription drugs. It is the strongest warning a drug can carry before it is pulled from the shelves. Black-box warnings take their name from the black border around the drug label or patient information.

### **What antipsychotic drugs have black box warnings?**

Here are the antipsychotic drugs that must have them:

- Risperdal (Risperidone)
- Zyprexa (Olanzapine)
- Seroquel (Quetiapine Fumarate)
- Geodon (Ziprasidone Hydrochloride, Ziprasidone Mesylate)
- Abilify (Aripiprazole)
- Invega (Paliperidone, Paliperidone Palmitate)
- Haldol (Haloperidol Decanoate, Haloperidol Lactate, Haloperidol)
- Moban (Molindone Hydrochloride)
- Navane (Thithixene)
- Symbyax (Fluoxetine Hydrochloride, Olanzapine)
- Clozaril (Clozapine)
- Fazaclo (Clozapine)

### **What to do if you are concerned your loved one is being overmedicated**

The side effects of antipsychotic drugs can be harmful, robbing individuals of their quality of life. Side effects include excessive sedation; lethargy; dizziness and unsteadiness, which can lead to increased falls and injuries; as well as social withdrawal, reduced well-being and increased cognitive decline.

As a friend or family member, you should watch for changes in behavior or side effects that could indicate your loved one needs different medications. Periodically review what drugs are being administered. Talk with the prescribing doctor if you have questions or concerns.

If you still have concerns, talk with the long-term care ombudsman and file a complaint with the state agency that regulates nursing facilities.

If your friend or family member is taking a black box drug, you should immediately ask the doctor who prescribed the drug what medical and nonmedical alternatives are available.

Here are resources to ensure that your loved one is provided the right kind of care.

- The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care has a list of resources and [Promising Practices to Reduce the Use of Antipsychotic Medications](#).
- Long-term care ombudsmen are advocates for residents of nursing homes, board and care homes, and assisted living facilities. Ombudsmen provide information about how to find a facility and what to do to get quality care. Here's how to contact the long-term care ombudsman in your state. [http://theconsumervoice.org/get\\_help](http://theconsumervoice.org/get_help)
- You should file a complaint with your state's regulatory agency if you are concerned about the care, treatment or services your loved one received or did not receive in the nursing home. Some reasons for filing a complaint would be overuse of antipsychotic medications, abuse, neglect, poor care, not enough staff, unsafe or unsanitary conditions, dietary problems or mistreatment. Here's how to [contact your state agency](#).

Preventing overmedication and inappropriate medication is a key to getting good care in a nursing facility. Here are some helpful resources about how to choose a nursing home:

- AARP's tips for [how to choose a nursing home](#).
- [Nursing Home Compare](#), operated by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), lists every nursing home in the United States that receives funds from Medicaid or Medicare and provides basic data drawn from federal and state inspections.

Learn more about [what caregivers need to know about monitoring medications for nursing home residents](#).