

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT MEDICATIONS AND MEDICATION APPOINTMENTS

This handout contains some important information about medications and medication appointments at the clinic that will be treating you. Please read it carefully and then keep it in a safe place such as your medicine cabinet for future reference.

APPOINTMENTS

The doctors who staff the clinics are usually part-time workers and they are not available on a 24-hour on-call basis. It is important that you make every effort to keep your scheduled appointments. If you cannot keep a scheduled appointment, please try to call in advance to reschedule it. Here are some other important guidelines:

1. During each visit with your doctor, he or she will tell you when to make your next appointment (e.g., you may be told to make your next appointment in two weeks). Stop at the receptionist window after each visit and set up your next visit. It is not scheduled until it has been written down in the doctor's appointment book by one of the secretaries.
2. If you are seen by the doctor at a time when there is not a receptionist available, please call the next day and make your next appointment. The clinics are very busy. Schedules fill up quickly. You cannot wait several weeks before calling.
3. The clinics seldom cancel appointments for doctor illness or for bad weather. If that does happen, they will try to notify you in advance. It is important that you always provide them with your current address and phone numbers (at home, your cell phone or pager, and any work or alternate numbers), so they can contact you as necessary.
4. If you are keeping your appointments and you are taking your medications as prescribed, you will not likely run out of pills.

PRECAUTIONS

The process of finding the best medication(s) to help each person can take some time. It may also require several changes of medication until the right combination is found. Be patient. Most mental health problems did not arise overnight and, similarly, they cannot be solved immediately. In fact, it sometimes takes several days (or weeks) until the full benefit of a new medication is realized.

Before starting you on medication, the doctor may ask you to get a physical examination and/or lab tests (blood studies), in order to rule out physical problems that might be causing your symptoms or which might interfere with giving you some medications. The doctor might also ask you to have these tests repeated from time to time.

Keep your medications (and your unfilled prescriptions) in a safe place so that they will not get damaged, lost, or stolen. Keep them away from children or anyone else who might accidentally try them. Here are some other guidelines:

1. Do not take more pills than the doctor has prescribed. You must discuss any changes with your doctor before making changes on your own.
2. Do not drink alcohol or take street drugs while you are taking medications.
3. Do not mix medications (take several kinds at once) without prior approval by your doctor(s). Be sure to tell all of your doctors (at the mental health clinic and elsewhere) and even your dentist all of the prescription and over-the-counter medications you are taking.
4. Drinking too much caffeinated coffee, cola, etc., may cause restlessness and can interfere with the way your medications will work for you. Smoking or chewing tobacco can also interfere with your medications.
5. There are many common side effects of the medications used to treat mental health problems. These often are things such as dry mouth, blurred vision, and drowsiness. Most of these will become less bothersome as your body adjusts to the medication. Please be careful if you experience drowsiness - avoid driving and operating machinery until this problem is resolved.
6. Let the staff at the clinic know if you are having problems that you think may be related to the medications you are taking.
7. Some medications may give you uncomfortable side effects (some of which can be serious) if you suddenly stop taking them. It is often better to be slowly tapered off a medication. If you are thinking of stopping your medication, please discuss the matter with your doctor first.
8. Do not take someone else's pills because you think they might be better than your own. Instead, talk to your doctor about making a change to another medication.

LAB TESTS / BLOOD WORK

As mentioned above, the doctor may ask you to get lab work done from time to time. This is often needed to assure that the proper level of medication is maintained in your blood stream, and to monitor how the medications relate to your general health. Here are some guidelines for lab work:

1. Get lab work done well before your next appointment. It takes several days for the results to arrive at the doctor's office.
2. Be sure to follow any special instructions on the lab slip. You may need to fast (avoid eating or drinking except for water) from midnight the night before the test until after the blood is drawn. You may also be asked not to take your morning pills until after the test is done.
3. Diabetics, or others with special medical problems or concerns, should ask the doctor for any special precautions with fasting or any other aspect of lab tests.

IF YOU RUN OUT OF MEDICATION

As noted above, if you are keeping your appointments and taking your medications as prescribed, it is very unlikely you will ever run out of pills. If you do run low, check if you have filled your most recent prescription and if there are any refills on the prescription. Try to contact the clinic early - when you still have some pills left - do not wait till they have all been used.

We realize accidents do happen. When you call the clinic to say you have run out, please bear in mind that the clinic does not always have a doctor available and it may be some time before they can talk to your doctor about it. When calling and leaving a message with one of their secretaries (or on their answering machine), be sure to clearly indicate that you are calling about a medication problem.

Occasionally, the clinic might be able to get a prescription written for you to pick up (or get one phoned in to your pharmacy) within a few hours. Other times it may take several days to get a prescription. There may also be times when you may have to wait until you are again able to see your doctor to get a new prescription.

Your doctor and/or your therapist will probably want to speak to you about why you ran out. A new appointment will be scheduled as soon as possible. That new appointment must be made before the clinic tries to get you more medication, so that the staff there will know how many pills are needed. Someone on the clinic staff may ask you several questions about your medications including things like:

- How many pills are left in your bottles?
- How often were you taking the pills?
- Have you got any refills or new prescriptions?
- What date is on the bottles?
- What is the name and phone number of your pharmacy?

Before calling, have your pill bottles handy. Also, it is simpler for everyone if you try to stick to using one pharmacy for all of your prescriptions.

If you have been out of medication for several weeks or months, the clinic will not treat the situation as an emergency. Very often, they will simply schedule you for the next available appointment with your doctor.

If, on the other hand, the clinic staff members suspect they are seeing a pattern of medication abuse, they will limit or change medication(s) rather than continue with a situation that allows further potential for patterns of drug abuse.

IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY

If a serious medication problem arises when you cannot reach the mental health clinic, please contact your primary care physician or, if needed, visit an emergency room. Afterwards, when the emergency is resolved, please let the mental health clinic know what happened. They may want you to schedule a new appointment for you more quickly than usual, or they may want the doctor to call you, in order to be sure you are still getting the best medication(s) for your current overall healthcare.