

Treatment for Mental Disorders

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EDITORIAL NOTE

A mental disorder, also called a mental illness or psychiatric disorder is a behavioural or mental pattern that causes significant distress or impairment of personal functioning. Such features may be persistent, relapsing and remitting, or occur as a single episode. Mental disorders include: depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and other psychoses, dementia, and developmental disorders including autism. There are effective strategies for preventing mental disorders such as depression.

Treatment for mental disorders depends on the type of mental illness you have, its severity and what works best for you. In many cases, a combination of treatments works best. If you have a mild mental illness with well-controlled symptoms, treatment from your primary care provider may be sufficient. The best medications for you will depend on your particular situation and how your body responds to the medication.

Some of the most commonly used classes of prescription psychiatric medications include:

Antidepressants: Antidepressants are used to treat depression, anxiety and sometimes other conditions. They can help improve symptoms such as sadness, hopelessness, lack of energy, difficulty concentrating and lack of interest in activities. Antidepressants are not addictive and do not cause dependency.

Anti-anxiety medications: These drugs are used to treat anxiety disorders, such as generalized anxiety disorder or panic disorder. They may also help reduce agitation and insomnia. Long-term anti-anxiety drugs typically are antidepressants that also work for anxiety. Fast-acting anti-anxiety drugs help with short-term relief, but they also have the potential to cause dependency, so ideally they'd be used short term.

Mood-stabilizing medications: Mood stabilizers are most commonly used to treat bipolar disorders, which involves

alternating episodes of mania and depression. Sometimes mood stabilizers are used with antidepressants to treat depression.

Antipsychotic medications: Antipsychotic drugs are typically used to treat psychotic disorders, such as schizophrenia. Antipsychotic medications may also be used to treat bipolar disorders or used with antidepressants to treat depression.

Psychotherapy, also called talk therapy, involves talking about your condition and related issues with a mental health professional. During psychotherapy, you learn about your condition and your moods, feelings, thoughts and behaviour. With the insights and knowledge you gain, you can learn coping and stress management skills. There are many types of psychotherapy, each with its own approach to improving your mental well-being. Psychotherapy often can be successfully completed in a few months, but in some cases, long-term treatment may be needed. It can take place one-on-one, in a group or with family members.

Brain-stimulation treatments are sometimes used for depression and other mental health disorders. They're generally reserved for situations in which medications and psychotherapy haven't worked. They include electroconvulsive therapy, repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation, deep brain stimulation and vagus nerve stimulation.

Hospital and residential treatment program is needed when sometimes mental illness becomes so severe that you need care in a psychiatric hospital. This is generally recommended when you can't care for yourself properly or when you're in immediate danger of harming yourself or someone else. Options include 24-hour inpatient care, partial or day hospitalization, or residential treatment, which offers a temporary supportive place to live. Another option may be intensive outpatient treatment.

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Received date: December 01, 2020; **Accepted date:** December 17, 2020; **Published date:** December 24, 2020

Citation: Joseph M (2020) Treatment for Mental Disorders. Drug Des S7: e001.

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