



What are medication side effects?

- A medication side effect is an unintended and unwanted effect that happens during medication treatment. Side effects may occur with any prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) medication, natural health product or vitamin supplement.
- Most medication side effects are mild and decrease with time. It is possible for some individuals to experience a side effect that they feel is serious or long-lasting. If this occurs, speak with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about ways to manage them. Below are some of the more common side effects experienced by individuals taking prescription medications and some suggested ways to lessen these effects.
- Side effects are usually more common when starting a medication or after a dose increase. If any of the side effects listed below are troublesome for you, or you experience a side effect not listed below, please discuss this with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.
- Suddenly stopping certain medications may also cause side effects. If you think you need to stop taking a medication, speak with your doctor about the best way to stop taking the medication to avoid side effects.

Common Side Effects and Management Strategies

If you are experiencing any of these side effects, try the suggested management strategies:

- **Agitation** (*avoid caffeine from energy drinks, colas, teas, and coffee*)
- **Dizziness or feeling lightheaded** (*get up slowly from a sitting or lying down position*)
- **Headache** (*use a pain-reliever like acetaminophen (plain Tylenol®)*)
- **Feeling tired or drowsy** (*take the dose at bedtime*)
- **Difficulty sleeping** (*take the daily dose at an earlier time; starting a bedtime routine; decrease intake of caffeine-containing beverages; or taking a medication for sleep such as melatonin*)
- **Excessive sweating** (*strong antiperspirants can help; talk with a doctor or pharmacist*)
- **Skin rash or dry/itchy skin** (*use a skin moisturizer*)
- **Acne** (*use an oil-free face wash daily. Discuss with your doctor if acne becomes severe*)
- **Increased sun sensitivity** (*use a broad-spectrum sunscreen daily. Limit sun exposure to avoid sunburns*)
- **Dry eyes** (*use artificial tears eye drops and limiting screen time*)
- **Blurred vision** (*usually disappears in 1-2 weeks; use bright lights or wear glasses when reading*)
- **Nasal congestion/stuffy nose** (*use a saline nasal spray*)
- **Dry mouth** (*increase fluid intake, chew sugar-free gum, suck on sugar-free sour candies, ice chips, or popsicles*)
- **Excessive drooling** (*often occurs at night; other medications may help this; talk to your doctor*)
- **Decreased appetite, mild weight loss** (*take the medication with a meal or eating smaller meals more often. Take the medication with breakfast, drink a smoothie, a high protein drink, or Boost®/Ensure® at lunch, and have a significant meal when the medication wears off*)
- **Weight gain** (*monitor your food intake, increase your exercise; if you take a medication from the antipsychotic class, see the Healthy Living Toolkit for more information: keltymentalhealth.ca/eating-well*)
- **Nausea or stomach ache** (*take the medication with food*)
- **Constipation** (*drink more fluids, exercise, and increase the amount of vegetables, fruits, and fiber in your diet; if severe, talk with your doctor or pharmacist about medications to relieve constipation*)

Do not take part in activities that require physical coordination, drive or operate heavy machinery until you know how the medication(s) you take affect you.