

Education for Patients: Long Acting Medications (LAMs)

What are long acting medications, and how do they work?

Long acting medications (LAMs) are antipsychotic medications that are designed to release medication into your system slowly over a few weeks or up to a few months. They maintain a steady level of medication in your system, which generally leads to less medication use per month. Patients generally experience fewer side effects and improved symptoms and they no longer have to remember to take a pill every day.

Are LAMs more effective than oral medications such as pills and capsules?

Studies suggest that LAMs are more effective than oral medications because they are better at reducing symptoms and they improve the ability to function day-to-day. Use of LAMs also leads to fewer hospitalizations and other emergency services, and studies suggest that starting LAMs early in treatment improves long-term outcomes for people with chronic mental health issues.

How are LAMs given, and how often do I receive the medication?

LAMs are given by injection, usually by a nurse in an outpatient clinic or a pharmacist at a pharmacy. The injection is given into a large muscle, usually in the shoulder or the buttocks. The injection is always done with the agreement of the patient (or their legal guardian, if the patient is not their own legal guardian). Many LAMs are given monthly, some are given every two weeks, and others can be given every 2 to 3 months. How frequently an injection is given depends on the medication that is prescribed.

Who should consider changing to LAMs?

Anyone taking an oral antipsychotic medication is a good candidate for switching to a long acting medication (LAM), particularly a patient who is taking a medication that works well for them through improved symptoms and minimal side effects. Not all antipsychotic medications are available in long-acting formulations.

Are the side effects for LAMs better or worse than with oral medications?

Side effects for LAMs are the same or less when compared with oral medications. If side effects develop while using a LAM, the medication can be stopped and the patient switched to another medication. While any injection can cause mild pain at the injection site, such pain usually lasts no more than 24 hours, and can be treated with standard over the counter pain medications (Tylenol (acetaminophen), Motrin (ibuprofen), Naprosyn (naproxen), etc.).

If my symptoms are new, should I choose a LAM?

If your prescriber recommends using an antipsychotic medication for 3 months or more, you should consider starting with an LAM even if your symptoms are new. An oral medication is usually used briefly before starting a LAM, to ensure the patient does not have bad side effects from the medication, and to get the medication to an effective dose quickly.

How do LAMs help in the long term?

Many people don't like taking medication in general. It's sometimes inconvenient and challenging to remember to take a pill every day, month after month. LAMs free patients from the drudgery of remembering to take medication every single day.

Side effects from antipsychotic medications can be difficult to experience. And for some, stigma may interfere with their willingness to regularly take daily medications. Some people feel that taking mental health medications is a sign of weakness or indicates they are flawed. For others with very serious symptoms, they may not recognize their own symptoms.

For these and various other reasons, people taking antipsychotic medications can stop taking them altogether, even though they have proven effective at reducing symptoms. This can lead to negative outcomes such as repeated crises; repeated hospitalizations; and, in extreme circumstances, involuntary treatment. Use of LAMs can help break this traumatic cycle and lead to long-term recovery that is stable and independent.

I have been injected against my will in the past. Are LAMs just another term for forced treatment?

Some patients may have received involuntary treatment, including use of short-acting injectable medications, in the past. If so, they may understandably be suspicious of any medication given by injection.

LAMs are a completely different type of treatment and are used for completely different reasons. LAMs are always given in a planned way. Patients should collaborate directly with their provider to determine whether LAMs are right for them.



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