psychofarm

MEDICATION HOW-TO

Low-Dose Aripiprazole for High Prolactin

Adding it to fix a side effect of another antipsychotic

For people whose antipsychotic has raised prolactin: what prolactin does, how a small added dose of aripiprazole lowers it, what to expect, and what to watch for.

Prolactin is a hormone that tells the body to make breast milk. Some antipsychotics, especially risperidone (Risperdal), paliperidone (Invega) and haloperidol (Haldol), raise it. **Aripiprazole** (Abilify) is an antipsychotic that lowers it. A small dose added to your current medicine brought prolactin back to normal for about 4 in 5 people in a review of five trials, and it lets you keep the medicine that is working for your illness. Using aripiprazole this way is off label. Your prescriber sets the dose, which is usually much lower than the dose used to treat psychosis.

SIGNS OF HIGH PROLACTIN

- **Women:** periods that are irregular or stop, milk leaking from the breasts, vaginal dryness, low sex drive.
- **Men:** low sex drive, erection problems, breast swelling, sometimes milk leaking.
- **Anyone:** trouble getting pregnant.

OTHER CAUSES YOUR PRESCRIBER MAY CHECK

- Pregnancy, which raises prolactin naturally.
- An underactive thyroid, or kidney problems.
- Other medicines, such as metoclopramide (Reglan).
- A small, usually harmless growth in the pituitary gland (at the base of the brain), if the level is very high or you have headaches or vision changes.

ANTIPSYCHOTICS AND PROLACTIN

EFFECT ON PROLACTIN	EXAMPLES
Often raise it a lot	Risperidone (Risperdal), paliperidone (Invega), haloperidol (Haldol) and other older antipsychotics
Sometimes raise it a little	Olanzapine (Zyprexa), lurasidone (Latuda), ziprasidone (Geodon)
Rarely raise it	Quetiapine (Seroquel), clozapine (Clozaril), brexpiprazole (Rexulti), cariprazine (Vraylar). Aripiprazole often lowers it.

WHY IT IS WORTH FIXING

High prolactin can stop periods and fertility, lower sex drive and cause breast leaking, and over years it can thin the bones. Sexual side effects are also one of the most common reasons people stop a medicine that is helping them. A high number with no symptoms does not always need treatment; your prescriber treats the symptoms, not just the number.

THE USUAL PATH

Check other causes → Add a small dose → Recheck prolactin in a few weeks → Symptoms ease

HOW TO TAKE IT

1. **Once a day, usually in the morning.** It can be a little energizing, so the morning suits most people. Take it with or without food.
2. **Keep taking your other medicine.** Take your main antipsychotic exactly as before, unless your prescriber changes it. Stopping it can bring your illness back.
3. **Expect a blood test.** Your prescriber checks prolactin before you start and again after several weeks. Periods and other symptoms often take a month or two longer to settle.
4. **Watch for restlessness.** An inner restlessness or urge to keep moving (akathisia) can come with aripiprazole, mostly early. Tell your prescriber: it is treatable.
5. **Plan for fertility.** As prolactin falls, you can become fertile again quickly, even before your periods return. Use birth control if you do not want to become pregnant.
6. **If you miss a dose.** Take it when you remember that day. If it is nearly the next day, skip it. Never take two doses at once.

WHAT YOU MAY NOTICE

- Restlessness, trouble sleeping, nausea, headache or feeling a bit anxious, mostly in the first weeks.
- Rarely, new movements of the face or tongue. Tell your prescriber.
- Periods returning, less breast leaking, and sex drive coming back over the following months.

GOOD TO KNOW

- Tell your prescriber about new urges to gamble, shop, eat or have sex that are hard to control. They can happen even at low doses.
- Pregnant or breastfeeding? Tell your prescriber. Aripiprazole can lower milk supply.
- Some medicines change aripiprazole levels. Ask your pharmacist about any new medicine.

QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

QUESTION	ANSWER
Why not just switch medicines?	Switching can work too, but it risks losing what is helping your illness. Adding aripiprazole keeps your main medicine. A lower dose of your main medicine is another option.
Will it change how my main medicine works?	In the studies, symptoms stayed steady. Tell your prescriber if your symptoms change in either direction.
How long will I take it?	Usually for as long as you take the medicine that raised your prolactin.
What if my prolactin stays high?	Your prescriber may adjust the dose, look again for other causes, or change your main medicine.

MY LOG

WHEN	PERIOD DATES	BREAST LEAKING?	SEX DRIVE (0 TO 10)	RESTLESSNESS (0 TO 10)	PROLACTIN RESULT
Start					
Month 1					
Month 2					
Month 3					
Month 4					

Rate sex drive from 0 (none) to 10 (your usual), and restlessness from 0 (none) to 10 (cannot sit still).

GET HELP RIGHT AWAY

Call 911 for a seizure, fainting, trouble breathing, swelling of the face, lips or throat, a sudden severe headache, or a high fever with stiff muscles and confusion.

Restlessness that makes you feel desperate, or thoughts of suicide: call or text 988 or call your prescriber right away, and call 911 if you are in danger.

Call your prescriber the same day for a headache that will not go away or changes in your vision.

If anyone takes too much, call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 right away, even if they seem fine. Call 911 instead if they collapse, have a seizure, have trouble breathing or cannot be woken.

MY PLAN

My main antipsychotic:

My aripiprazole dose and time (from my prescriber):

My prolactin before, and my next blood test:

My birth control plan:

My prescriber's phone number:

Questions for my next visit:

Source. Written in new words for patients from the FDA-approved aripiprazole label and a 2013 meta-analysis of five randomized trials of added aripiprazole for high prolactin. Aripiprazole is used off label for this. The dose is set by your prescriber.

More free resources → psycho.farm/free

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