psychofarm

MEDICATION HOW-TO

Metformin With Your Antipsychotic

Taking it to limit weight gain

For people whose prescriber has added metformin to an antipsychotic: why, how to take it, how to get past the stomach upset, and when to skip it.

Some antipsychotic medicines, especially **olanzapine** (Zyprexa) and **clozapine** (Clozaril), and to a lesser degree risperidone, paliperidone and quetiapine, raise appetite and can cause weight gain and higher blood sugar and cholesterol. Much of the gain comes in the first months. **Metformin** is an old, inexpensive diabetes medicine that, taken alongside the antipsychotic, cuts down that weight gain and helps keep blood sugar in check. **You do not need to have diabetes to take it.** A 2024 international guideline recommends starting it at the same time as olanzapine or clozapine, and with other antipsychotics for people at higher risk. Using metformin this way is off label: the FDA approved it for diabetes, not for this.

HOW IT USUALLY GOES

Start low, with food → Step up every week or two → Stomach settles → Weight steadier by about 3 months

HOW TO TAKE IT

1. **Take it with food.** Take the extended-release kind once a day with your evening meal, and the regular kind with meals. Food cuts down stomach upset.
2. **Start low and go slow.** Your prescriber starts with a low dose and raises it over several weeks. Stomach side effects come mostly at the start and after each step up.
3. **Swallow extended-release tablets whole.** Do not crush, cut or chew them. You may see a soft, empty tablet shell in your stool. That is normal: the medicine was absorbed.
4. **Ride out the stomach upset.** Loose stools, gas, nausea or a metallic taste usually ease within a week or two. If they do not, ask about the extended-release kind or staying at a lower step longer.
5. **If you miss a dose.** Take it with your next meal that day if you remember in time. If not, skip it. Never take two doses at once.
6. **Keep the habits that help.** Metformin works best alongside regular meals, fewer sugary drinks and more movement. Weigh yourself once a month on the same scale and write it on page 2.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- It keeps you from gaining as much. It usually does not cause big weight loss.
- In studies, people who took it with their antipsychotic gained roughly 7 to 9 pounds less than people who did not.
- It works slowly. Judge it over about 3 months. It also helps blood sugar.

TELL YOUR PRESCRIBER IF

- Stomach upset lasts past two weeks at a steady dose.
- You gain more than a pound a week.
- You drink heavily or binge drink, or have liver disease or heart failure.
- You are pregnant or planning to be.
- You are very thirsty or urinating much more than usual.

WEIGHT RISK DIFFERS BY ANTIPSYCHOTIC

RISK	EXAMPLES	WHEN METFORMIN IS USUALLY STARTED
Higher	Olanzapine (Zyprexa), clozapine (Clozaril)	At the same time as the antipsychotic
Medium	Quetiapine (Seroquel), risperidone (Risperdal), paliperidone (Invega)	At the start if you are 25 or younger or already have weight, sugar, cholesterol or blood pressure problems; otherwise once your checks show weight gain
Lower	Aripiprazole (Abilify), ziprasidone (Geodon), lurasidone (Latuda)	Only if your checks show weight or blood sugar rising anyway

SKIP IT ON SICK DAYS AND BEFORE SCANS

- **Skip metformin** on days you are vomiting, have bad diarrhea, or cannot eat or drink normally. Start again when you are eating and drinking normally, and call your prescriber if you are sick for more than a day.
- Before a CT scan with dye, a heart catheter test, or surgery, tell the team you take metformin. They may have you stop it for a day or two and check your kidneys before you restart.

GOOD TO KNOW

- On its own, metformin rarely causes low blood sugar.
- Over years it can lower vitamin B12. Ask for a B12 check every year or two, sooner if your feet tingle or go numb.
- You will need kidney blood tests, often yearly.
- If your periods are irregular, metformin can restart ovulation and make pregnancy more likely. Use birth control if you do not want to become pregnant.

QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

QUESTION	ANSWER
I do not have diabetes. Is it safe?	Yes, for most people. It has been used for decades, and on its own it rarely causes low blood sugar. Your prescriber checks your kidneys first, because metformin is not safe when they work poorly.
Can I drink alcohol?	An occasional drink with food is usually fine. Heavy drinking or binge drinking raises the risk of a rare but serious problem called lactic acidosis (see below).
Does it mix with my other medicines?	Most psychiatric medicines are fine with it. Topiramate (Topamax) and some other medicines raise the lactic acidosis risk, so tell your pharmacist everything you take.
How long will I take it?	Often for as long as you take the antipsychotic. Your prescriber will look at your weight, blood sugar and side effects over time.
What about the weekly weight-loss shots?	Medicines such as semaglutide (Ozempic, Wegovy) are another option, mostly for people who have already gained a lot of weight or have diabetes. Ask if metformin is not enough.
Can I just stop the antipsychotic instead?	Do not stop it on your own: that can bring your illness back. If weight is a big problem, ask about switching to a medicine with less weight gain.

MY WEIGHT LOG

WHEN	WEIGHT	STOMACH SIDE EFFECTS	NOTES
Start			
Month 1			
Month 2			
Month 3			
Month 4			
Month 5			
Month 6			

GET HELP RIGHT AWAY

Rare but serious: lactic acidosis. Stop metformin and go to the ER if you feel very weak and unwell with any of these: unusual muscle pain, unusual sleepiness, new stomach pain with vomiting, feeling very cold or dizzy, or a slow or uneven heartbeat. Call 911 for trouble breathing.

Call your prescriber the same day for vomiting or diarrhea that lasts more than a day, or great thirst and urinating much more than usual. With confusion, call 911.

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. Keep it away from children.

MY PLAN

My antipsychotic:

My metformin dose and when I take it (from my prescriber):

My starting weight and date:

My next blood tests (sugar, cholesterol, kidneys, B12):

My prescriber's phone number:

Questions for my next visit:

Source. Written in new words for patients from the FDA-approved metformin label, a 2024 international guideline on metformin to prevent antipsychotic weight gain, and a Cochrane review. Metformin is used off label for this. The dose is set by your prescriber.

More free resources → psycho.farm/free

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