

# Emergencies when taking Antipsychotics

# Serotonin Syndrome

- A common chemical in your body is called Serotonin
- Serotonin helps cells in your body, like 1 brain cell talk to other cells
- That's why Selective SEROTONIN Reuptake Inhibitors like sertraline are such a useful type of medicine for problems like depression and anxiety
  - In this case the medication is adjusting how brain cells are talking to each other

# Serotonin Syndrome

- But what happens if the drugs effect serotonin too much?
- Not just you brain is affected - you can start effecting your blood flow, your bowels, tremors of your muscles and eyes, rigidity and paralysis
- This can easily lead to death
- If you think you may have this, showing up with flushing, vomiting or diarrhea, rigid paralysis get to the ER - CALL 911

# Serotonin Syndrome

- Prevention is the best defence
- It's important to use the right dose of meds on the right schedule and making sure your not mixing multiple drugs that affect Serotonin
- Avoid mixing these drugs:
  - Sertraline (Zoloft)
  - Fluoxetine (Prozac)
  - Citalopram/Escitalopram (Lexapro)
  - Venlafaxine (Effexor)
  - Duloxetine (Cymbalta)
  - Hydrochlorothiazide (Microzide)
  - Rosuvastatin (Crestor)
  - Dextroamphetamine/Amphetamine (Adderall)
  - Escitalopram (Lexapro)
  - Pantoprazole (Protonix)
  - Montelukast (Singulair)
  - Trazodone (Desyrel)
  - Simvastatin (Zocor)
  - Tamsulosin (Flomax)
  - Bupropion (Wellbutrin)
  - Fluoxetine (Prozac)

# Let's talk about more Common Reasons to Visit the *ER*

Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome

Feeling Confusion, Stiffness, and a Fever?

Acute Dystonia and Airway Compromise

Uncontrollable Movements of Neck and Tongue?

QT Prolongation & Torsades de Pointes

Taking Haloperidol or Ziprasidone?  
Heart Pounding?

Severe Akathisia with Agitation/  
Suicidality

Can't sit still? Feeling like you're losing control?

Seizures

Taking Clonazepam or have a recent increase in your antipsychotic dose? What about sudden jerks, tremors, twitching, or clumsiness?

# Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome

- This is an EMERGENCY requiring going to the ER
- These are common features:
  - Rigid paralysis, slow movements, or tremors
  - Fever
  - Getting Confused
  - Fast heart rate
  - Wetting yourself
- Usually 2-4 weeks after starting a medication
- Go to the ER, and if you've got it they'll probably give you dantrolene

# Acute Dystonia leading to Airway Compromise

- This is an EMERGENCY requiring going to the ER
- These are common features:
  - Long, lasting & painful muscle spasms around the head, neck, and tongue
  - This can affect a part of the throat causing your throat to close
  - Meaning you won't be able to breath
- Usually within days of starting an antipsychotic
- Go to the ER, because if you stop breathing, you won't have time for an ambulance

# QT Prolongation & Torsades de Pointes

- This is an EMERGENCY but it's hard to notice, so get ECGs every 6 months
- This happens most often with haloperidol and ziprasidone
- Your heart beat can become unstable on some antipsychotics. This is called QT Prolongation
- When they destabilize this way, it's called Torsades de Pointes
  - You're heart beats uncontrollably
  - It can get better on its own...
  - ... Or tire out

# QT Prolongation & Torsades de Pointes

- This needs the cause to stop, sometimes magnesium injections to stabilize the heart muscle, and sometimes cardioversion (similar to defibrillation)
- If this happens go to the ER, but the best prevention is **STAY UP TO DATE ON YOUR ECG! EVERY 6 MONTHS OR EARLIER!**

# Severe Akathisia and Agitation/Suicidality

- This is an EMERGENCY requiring vigilance and often guardians to be aware
- Akathisia is a common side effect of new antipsychotic use
  - Usually within the first 7 days
- It presents as restlessness, inability to sit still, pacing, and a feeling things are terribly wrong

# Severe Akathisia and Agitation/Suicidality

- Spend the first week or two actively talking to those around you about how you feel and what's going on
- If things are getting out of hand, go to the ER
- Otherwise... REACH OUT TO YOUR PRESCRIBER. THEY WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU
- If you can't reach them, go to an ER or Urgent Care

# Seizures

- All antipsychotics can make seizures more likely in a person
- Clozapine, Olanzapine, Quetiapine do this the most of all
- Risperidone, Haloperidol, Aripiprazole notably do this as well
- Other seizure risks involve Older age, Prior seizures or strokes, Dementia

# Seizures

- Seizure risk is lowered by starting with low dose antipsychotics and checking in with you
- If you ever have shaking, pass out, or feel suddenly confused, that's an emergency – call 911 or go to the ER.