Aripiprazole (say: ‘arry-pip-ra-azole)

What is aripiprazole used for?
- Aripiprazole (also called Abilify®) is mainly used to help treat the symptoms of psychosis, schizophrenia and mania
- It can also be used to help depression (with antidepressants) and in a crisis
- Aripiprazole is made as tablets, melt-in-the-mouth tablets, a short-acting injection, a syrup and a long-acting injection (Abilify Maintena®, see separate leaflet).

What is the usual dose of aripiprazole?
- The usual dose of aripiprazole by mouth is around 10-30mg a day (morning or evening is usual).

How should I take aripiprazole?
- Swallow the tablets with at least half a glass of water whilst sitting or standing
- This is to make sure that they reach the stomach and do not stick in your throat
- For the liquid, use the medicine spoon, dropper or oral syringe to carefully measure the correct dose
- For the melt-in-the-mouth tablets, just put them on your tongue and they will dissolve quickly.

When should I take aripiprazole?
- Take it at regular times each day
- You can take it with or after food.

What are the alternatives to aripiprazole?
- This will depend on what you are taking it for
- There are many other antipsychotics, talking therapies and treatments for your symptoms.

How long will aripiprazole take to work?
- This will depend on what you are taking it for
- You may feel less agitated and calmer soon after the first few doses but the full effects will build-up over a few weeks.

How long will I need to keep taking aripiprazole for?
- This will depend on what you are taking it for
- It could be months or years to help stop the symptoms coming back.

Is aripiprazole addictive and can I stop taking aripiprazole suddenly?
- Aripiprazole is not addictive
- It is, however, unwise to stop taking it suddenly, even if you feel better
- Your symptoms can return if treatment is stopped too early. This may occur some weeks or even months after aripiprazole has been stopped
- When the time comes, you should withdraw aripiprazole by a gradual drop in the dose over several weeks or months, when your stress levels are low
- Discuss this fully with your prescriber, doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

What should I do if I forget to take a dose of aripiprazole at the right time?
- Take the missed dose as soon as you remember unless it is within about 12 hours of your next dose. If you remember after this just take the next dose as normal
- Do not try to catch up by taking two doses at once as you may get more side-effects.

Can I drink alcohol while I am taking it?
- If you drink alcohol while taking aripiprazole it may make you feel more sleepy
- This is important if you need to drive or operate machinery and you must seek advice on this.

Will aripiprazole affect my other medication?
Aripiprazole has a few possible interactions with other medicines. The main ones include:
- The effects of aripiprazole can be decreased by carbamazepine and increased by ketoconazole (an antifungal)
- If aripiprazole is taken with benzodiazepines, or alcohol, it may cause more sleepiness.

Can I drive or cycle while I am taking it?
- You may feel a bit sleepy at first when taking it so be careful as it may slow down your reactions

See our handy fact sheet on ‘Coming off Medicines’

See our “Handy charts” for psychosis and mania to help you compare the medicines available
This will help you talk to your prescriber, nurse, pharmacist or other healthcare professional.

Please see the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) for the full possible list. Not all of these interactions happen in everyone. Some of these medicines can still be used together but you will need to follow your doctor’s instructions carefully.
- Until this wears off, or you know how aripiprazole affects you, do not drive or operate machinery.

**Will I need any blood or other tests if I am taking aripiprazole?**

- You may need some tests to check on your health

**What to do about it**

This happens much more at the start of treatment but does wear off in a few weeks. Try and relax by taking deep breaths. Your doctor may give you a medicine to help with this for a few weeks. Sometimes taking the dose with some chocolate (about 4 squares from a bar) or some cheese can help.

**What sort of side-effects might I get if I am taking aripiprazole?**

This table shows some of the most common side effects and any you might need to take action on. You must also see the maker’s Patient Information Leaflet for the full list of possible side effects but do not be worried by this. Some people get no side effects at all. Some side effects are the brain getting used to a medicine and these usually wear off in a few days or weeks. Some of these are more marked when you start aripiprazole and usually wear off in a few weeks. Starting slower may help. If you think you might have a side effect to this medicine, you should ask your prescriber, pharmacist or other healthcare professional.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Side effect</th>
<th>What happens</th>
<th>What to do about it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMMON (more than about 1 in 100 people might get these)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akathisia</td>
<td>Being more on edge or restless. You may sweat a lot more.</td>
<td>This happens much more at the start of treatment but does wear off in a few weeks. Try and relax by taking deep breaths. Your doctor may give you a medicine to help with this for a few weeks. Sometimes taking the dose with some chocolate (about 4 squares from a bar) or some cheese can help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach upset</td>
<td>This includes feeling and being sick and getting diarrhoea.</td>
<td>This usually improves after the first few days. If it is severe discuss with your doctor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constipation</td>
<td>When you cannot pass stools, or poo, regularly, or cannot completely empty your bowels.</td>
<td>Make sure you eat enough fibre, cereal or fruit. Make sure you are drinking enough fluid. Keep active and get some exercise e.g. walking. If this does not help, ask your doctor or pharmacist for a mild laxative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>When your head is painful and pounding.</td>
<td>Ask your pharmacist if paracetamol is safe to take with any other medicines you may be taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insomnia</td>
<td>Not being able to get to sleep at night.</td>
<td>Discuss with your doctor. He or she may change the time of your dose. This happens much more at the start of treatment and you may need some sleeping tablets for a couple of weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blurred vision</td>
<td>Things look fuzzy and you can’t focus your eyes properly.</td>
<td>Don’t drive. See your doctor if you are worried. You won’t need glasses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tremor</td>
<td>Fine shaking of the hands</td>
<td>This is not dangerous but can be irritating. If it annoys you, your doctor may be able to give you something for it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RARE but important (can be serious if not dealt with quickly)**

| VTE – venous thromboembolism | Chest pain, worse if you breathe deeply or cough | See your Doctor straight away. The symptoms could be caused by a blood clot moving around the body. It mostly happens in older people. |
|------------------------------| Coughing up blood, dizziness or fainting        |                                                                                     |
|                              | Rapid breathing, short of breath or odd heartbeat. |                                                                                     |
| Impulsiveness                | Big increases in sexual urges, spending, eating, gambling                      | See your doctor in the next few days.                                               |
| NMS (Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome) | Fever or high temperature, sweating and confusion | See your Doctor straight away if you have had a change in dose or taken other antipsychotics. |
|                              | Racing heart beat, muscle stiffness, difficulty moving. |                                                                                     |

**The small print:** This leaflet is to help you understand about your medicine. You must also read the manufacturer’s Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). You may find more on the internet but beware as internet-based information is not always accurate. Do not share medicines with anyone else. The ‘Handy charts’ will help you compare the main medicines for each condition, how they work and their side effects. Go to our website for fuller answers to these and many other questions.

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