

Medicines in Child and Adolescent Mental Health

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Learning Outcomes



Background on prescribing for children and adolescents in Ireland

Medicines for depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, psychosis, eating disorders and ADHD



Side-effects and physical health monitoring

Resources for further information and support



Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Mental health conditions are among of the leading causes of illness and disability in adolescents and young adults

Their prevalence and diagnosis have been increasing over recent years - **1 in 7 10–19 year-olds** experience mental health difficulties



Impact of Mental Health Conditions

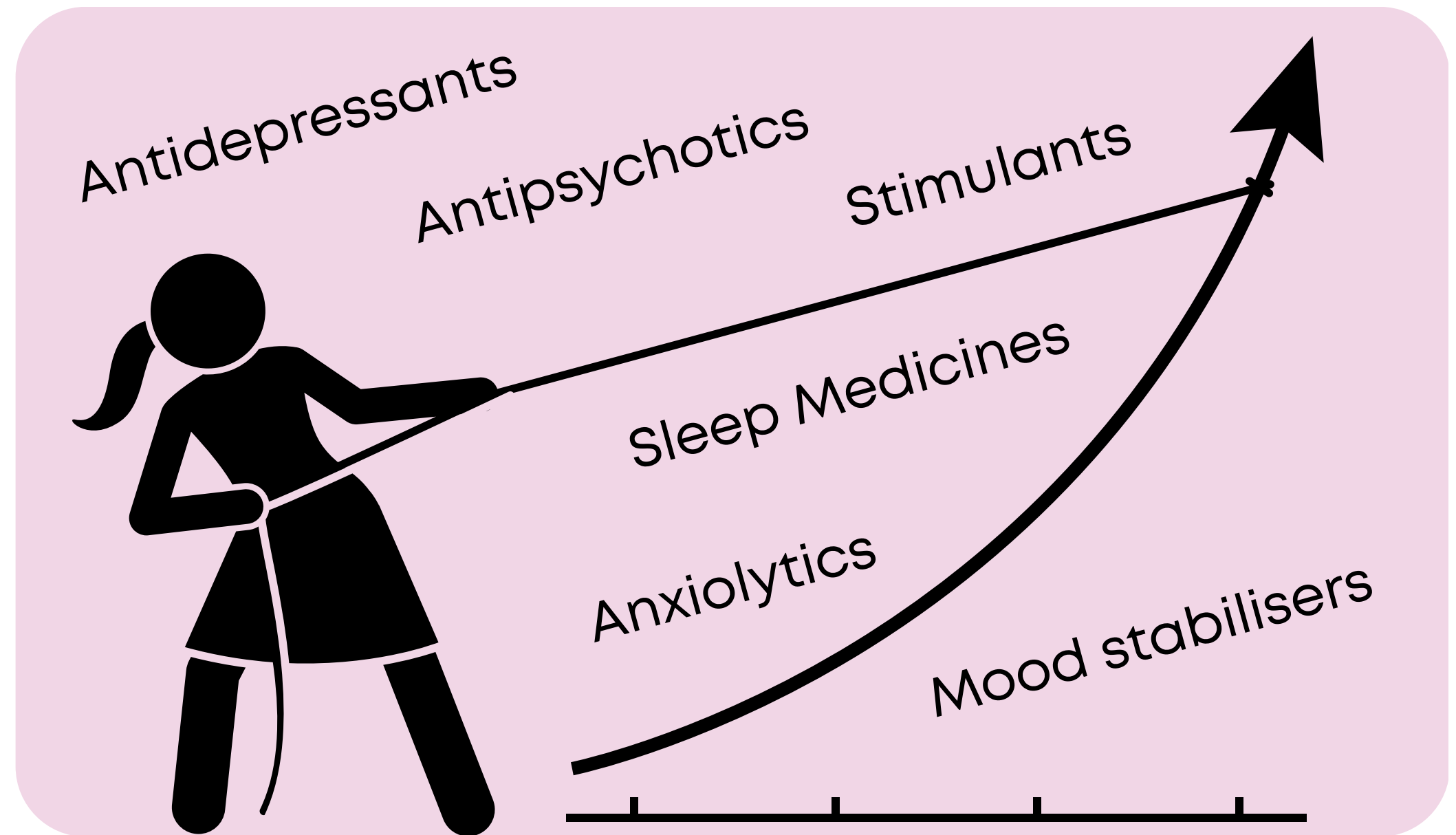
Three of the top 10 causes of disability adjusted life years for adolescents (10-24 years) are mental health-related



Suicide was the fourth leading cause of death in 15 to 29-year-olds

Increase in Mental Health Medicines

There has been a **global increase** in the prescription for children and young people of mental health medicines



CAMHS in the News

Irish Independent

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Experts call for 'radical' overhaul of CAMHS governance

Updated / Tuesday, 25 Mar 2025 07:31



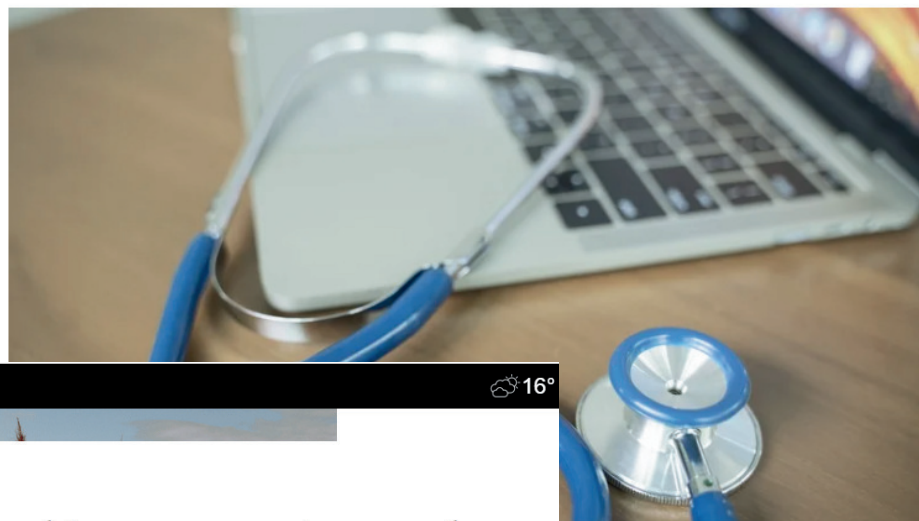
Home / Irish News

Staffing shortage in CAMHS deteriorated last year as demand increased



THE IRISH TIMES

16°



IS should receive specialist CAMHS-specific

Health

Findings of south Kerry Camhs review 'shocking, very serious and unacceptable', Taoiseach says

HSE report finds hundreds of children received 'risky' treatment from doctor

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Breaking | CPI

College of Psychiatrists calls for new CAMHS structures

By Reporter - 25th Mar 2025



THE IRISH TIMES

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Health

'We can't recruit': Psychiatrists propose Camhs reforms to improve patient care

College of Psychiatrists of Ireland launches model of governance and management structures for Camhs

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Dr Patricia Byrne said a report by the Mental Health Commission identified 'national deficits' in Camhs team staffing, resources and a failure to

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How the violence of the Dublin riots can be traced back to the Blueshirts

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Maskey Report

A review of a regional CAMHS Ireland centre (South Kerry, Ireland) was carried out between July 2016 and April 2021

The **Maskey Report** determined that care received by 240 patients failed to meet required standards

Unreliable
diagnoses

Inappropriate
prescribing

Poor monitoring of
adverse effects

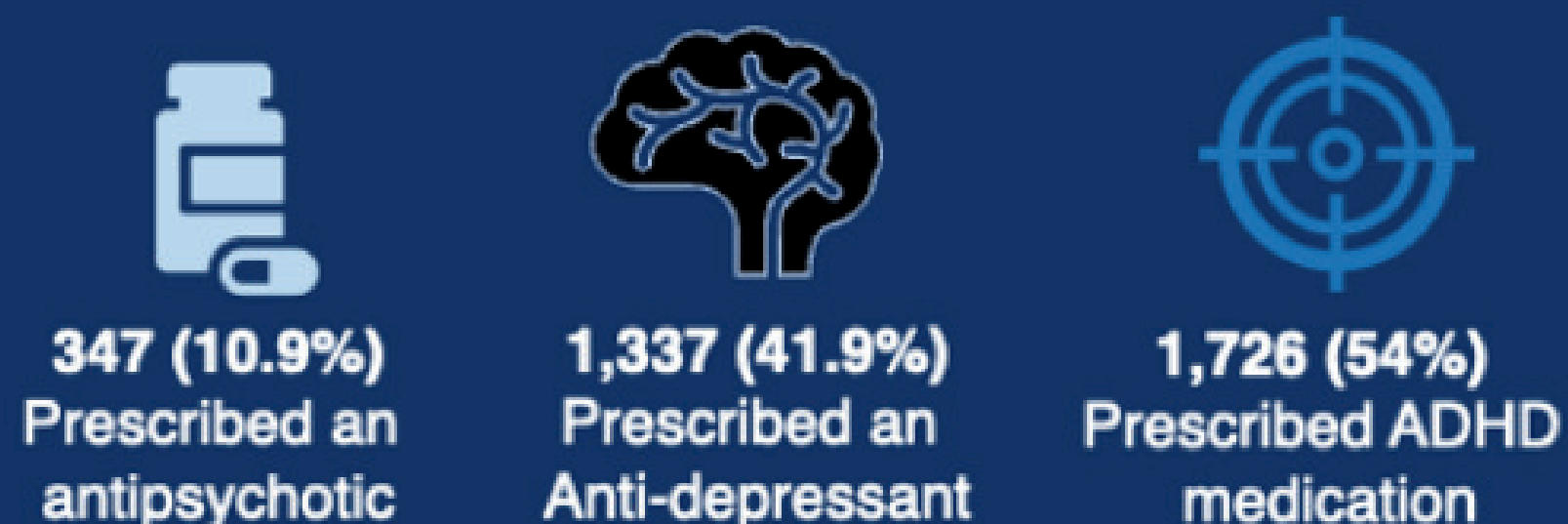
46 children experienced **significant harm**

HSE Post-Maskey Audit

Key Findings



3,193 prescribed medication on 31st December 2021



Documentation standards



Polypharmacy



'Pharmacists should be integrated into all CAMHS teams'

Prescribing in Ireland

European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (2025) 34:997–1009

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-024-02530-7>

ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

Recent trends in psychotropic medication use in children and adolescents in Ireland

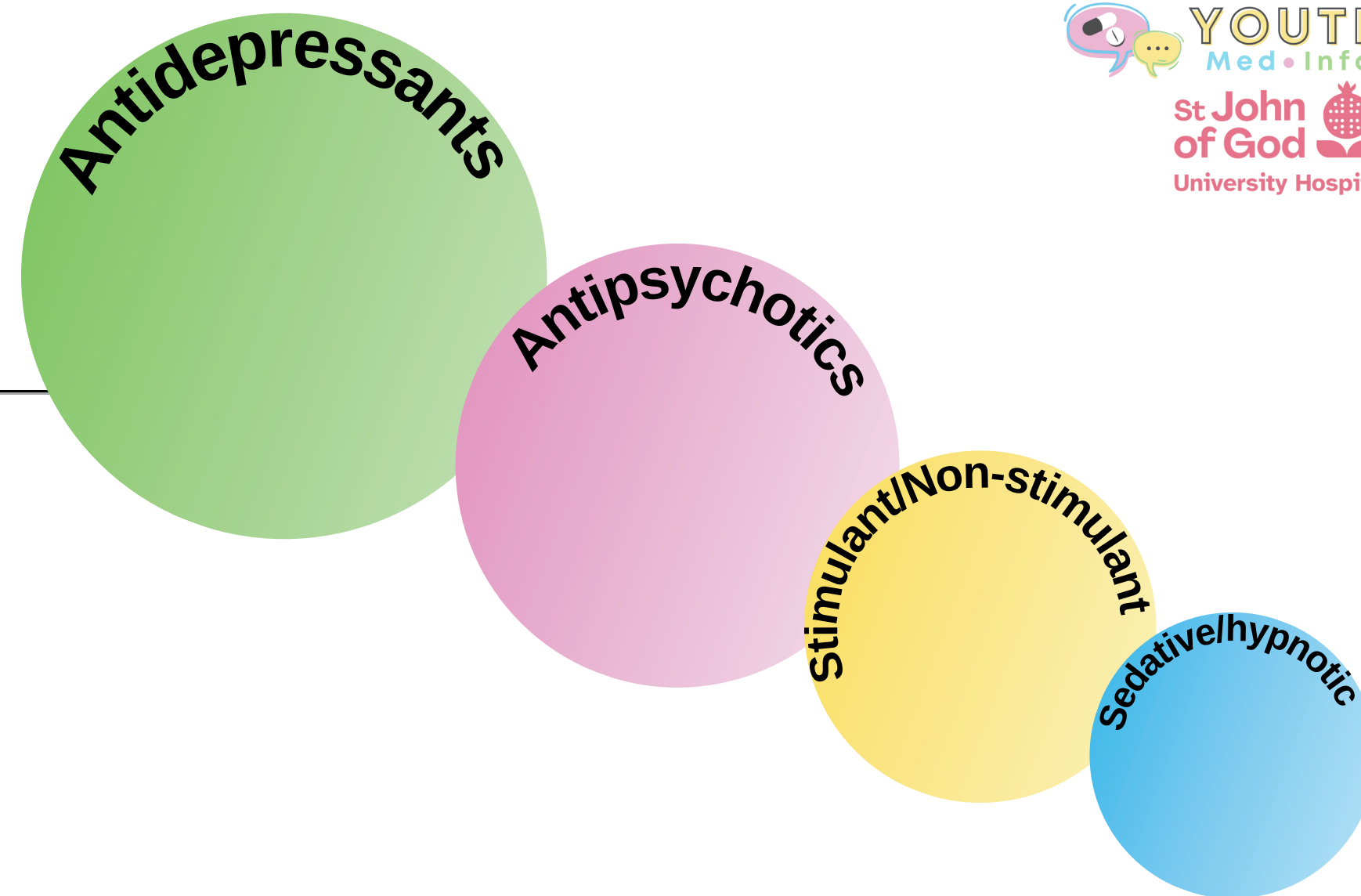
Rebecca Parkin¹ · Kathleen Bennett² · Fiona Mc Nicholas^{3,4,5} · John C. Hayden¹

Received: 12 October 2023 / Accepted: 11 July 2024 / Published online: 8 August 2024

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Increasing trend in prevalence of prescribing all mental health medicines: 2017 to 2021

Rates were found to be **lower than international comparators**




Prescribing in Ireland

Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine (2025), **42**, 28–33
doi:10.1017/ipm.2024.11



Original Research

Impact of a national audit on child and adolescent psychiatrists' prescribing practices

L. Bond^{1,2} , J. Z. Ong¹ and F. McNicholas^{1,2,3}

¹School of Medicine & Medical Science, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland, ²Department of Paediatric Liaison Psychiatry, Children's Hospital Ireland, Crumlin, Ireland and ³CAMHS, Lucena Clinic, Rathgar, Ireland

Improvement in prescribing practices - increased vigilance in monitoring and reference to existing guidelines

Hesitant and **cautious** approach to medicines use

Prescribing in a child vs. adult

Child is **still developing** – behavioural differences must be seen in this context

Child is **less likely to spontaneously report** changes in how they are feeling – must wait for an adult to notice and seek help

Child **does not have the verbal skills** to put their problems into words



Principles of Prescribing

- ➡ Target symptoms, not diagnoses
- ➡ Technical aspects of prescribing for children
- ➡ Start low, go slow
- ➡ Multiple medicines are often required
- ➡ Allow time for adequate trial
- ➡ Where possible, change one medicine at a time
- ➡ Monitor outcome in more than one setting
- ➡ Patient/family education about medicine essential



Child and Adolescent Mental Health

50% of all lifetime mental health conditions begins by **age 14**

75% by **age 24**

Depression

Eating disorders

ADHD

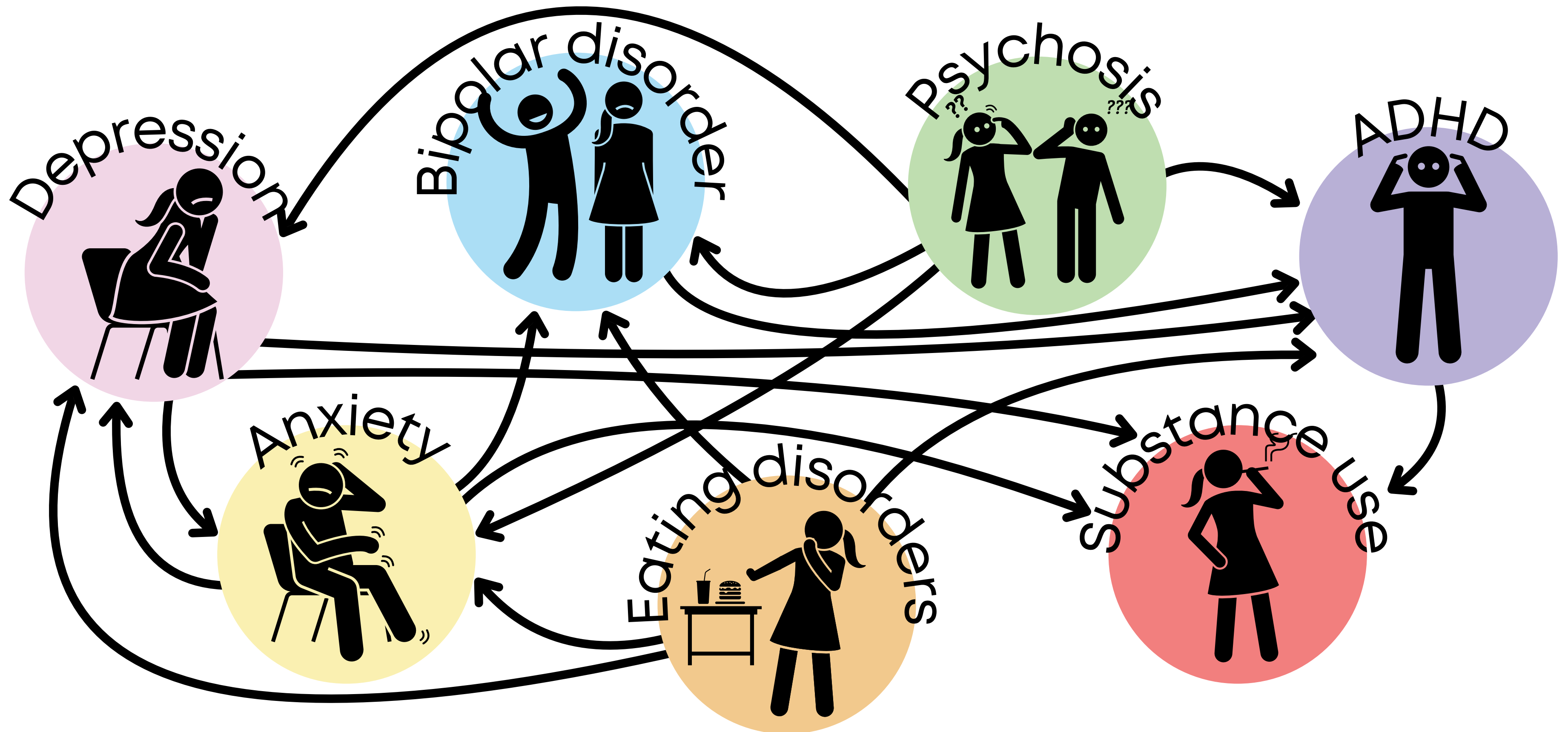
Anxiety

Bipolar disorder

Psychosis

ADHD before age 12

Comorbidities



Depression

Among the **more common** mental health conditions in children and adolescents

Nearly **3% of youth** worldwide are reported to have a depressive disorder



Nearly **30% of youth with MDD** reported some form of suicidality in the past year, and more than **10% reported a suicide attempt**

Rates of depression in younger children are lower than in adolescents

Medicines in Depression

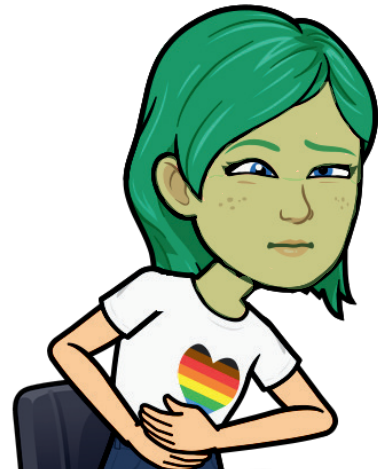
Fluoxetine - Moderate-severe depression only in combination with a concurrent psychological therapy

Sertraline OR

Citalopram - (UK) If treatment with fluoxetine is unsuccessful or is not tolerated

Escitalopram - (US)

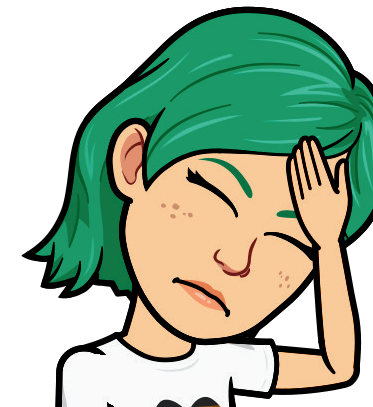
Side-effects - SSRIs



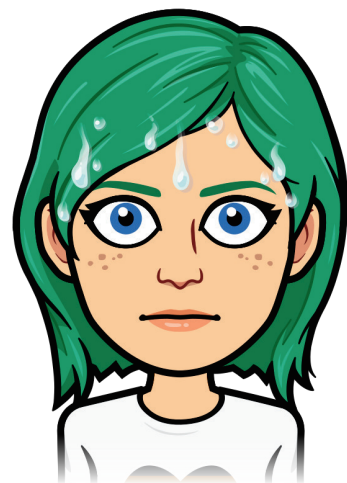
Feeling or
getting sick



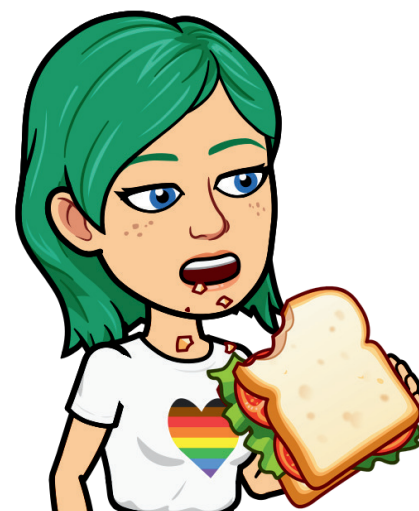
Diarrhoea



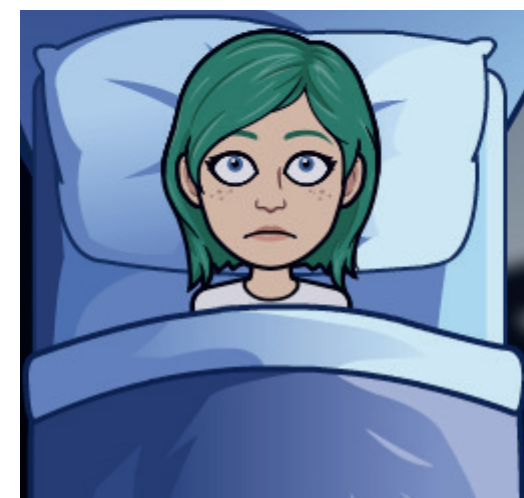
Headache



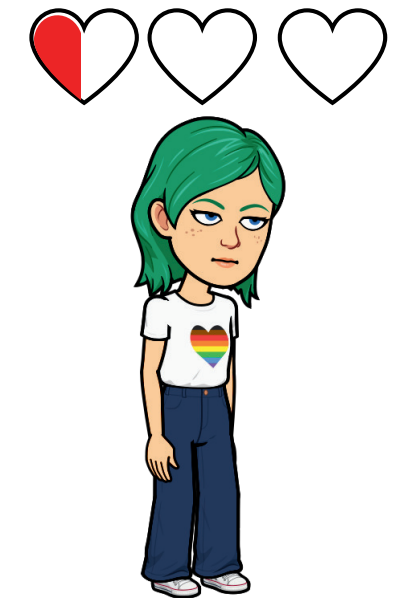
Feeling more
anxious



Loss of
appetite



Trouble
sleeping



Less interest in
intimate
relationships

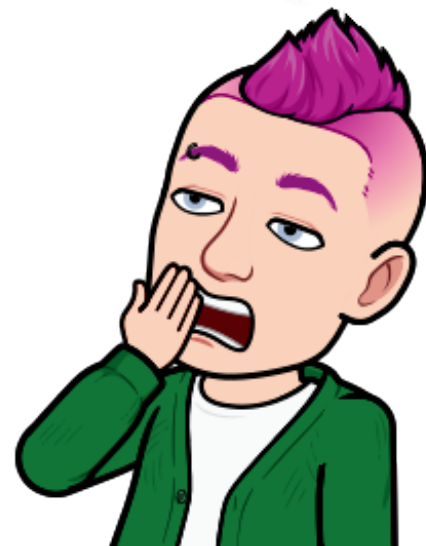
Medicines in Depression - Off-label

Mirtazapine

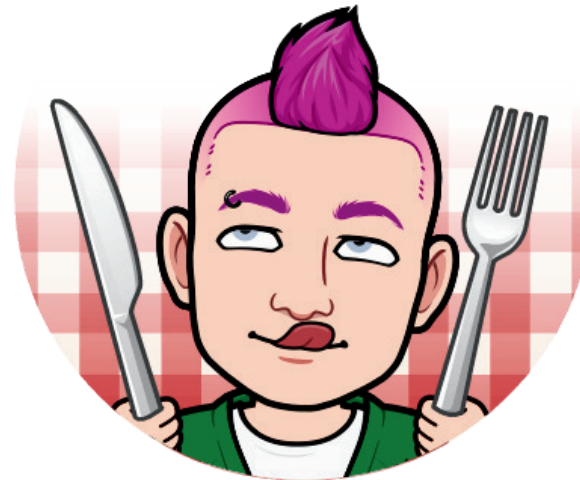
OR

Venlafaxine - use with caution due to possible associated increased suicidal ideation

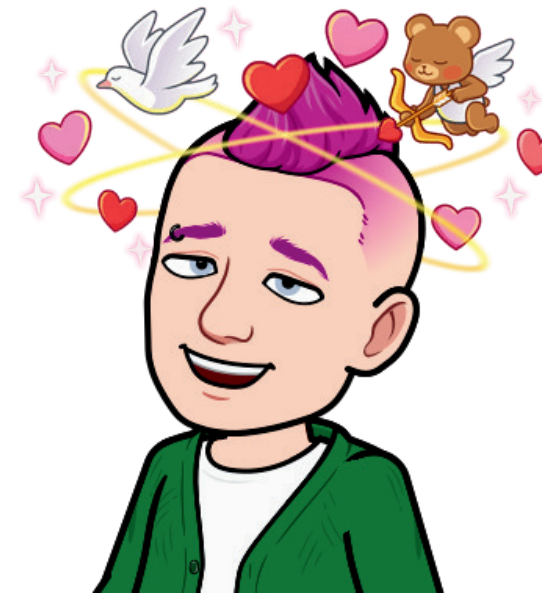
Side-effects - Mirtazapine



Drowsiness



Increased
appetite



Dizziness

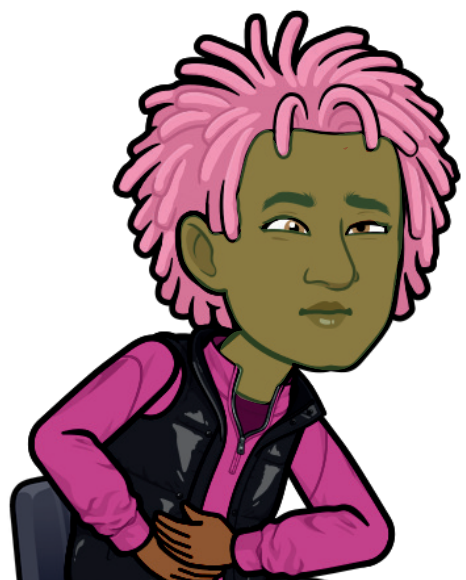


Dry mouth

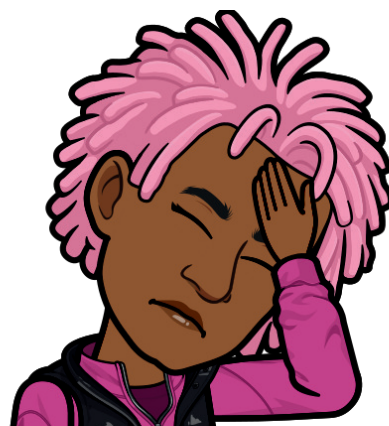


Headache

Side-effects - Venlafaxine



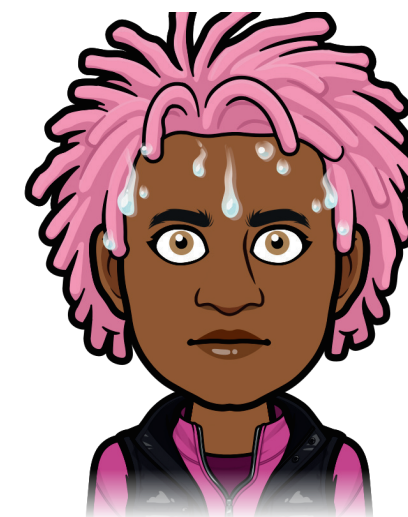
Feeling or
getting sick



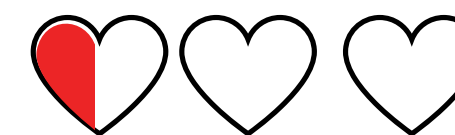
Headache



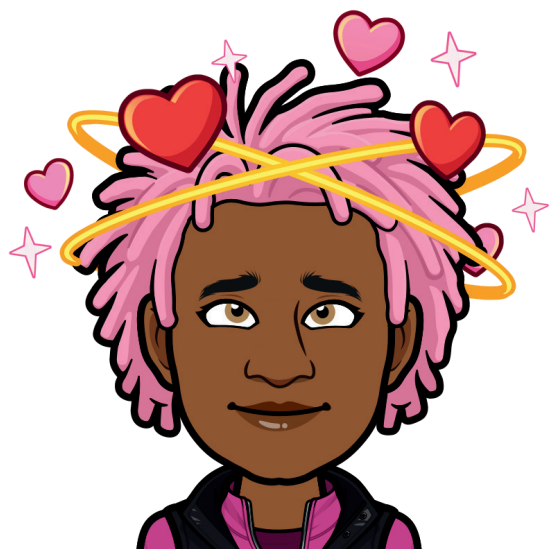
Dry mouth



Increased
sweating



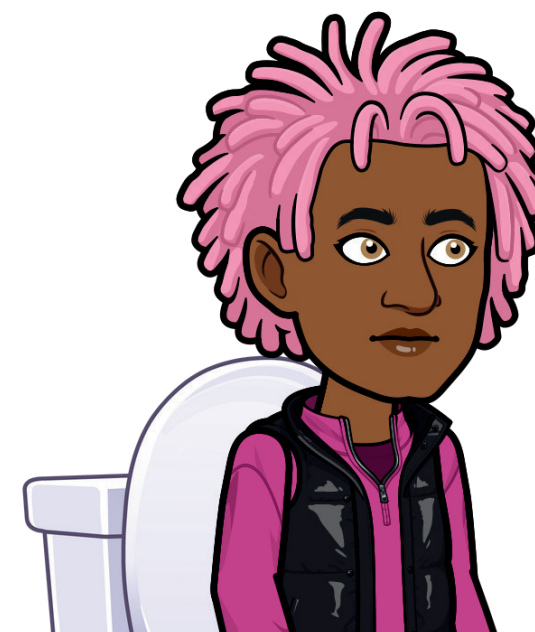
Less interest in
intimate
relationships



Dizziness

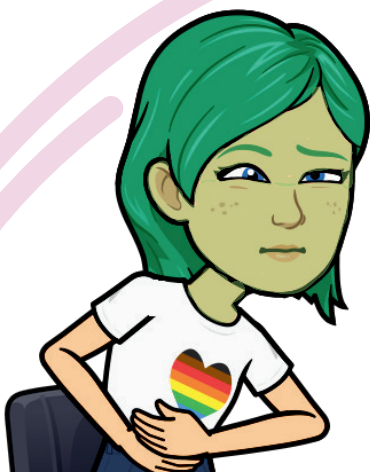


Trouble sleeping



Constipation

Side-effect Support



Feeling or
getting sick

Happens to **1 in 5** young people

Take the medicine with a **small amount food** like crackers or toast

Eat **smaller meals** more often during the day

Drinking **plenty of cool water** can be helpful and
sucking on sugar-free hard sweets

Duration of Treatment in Depression

Continue for at least **6-12 months** after remission



Assess: ✓ **Level of treatment response**

✓ **Clinical status**

✓ **Comorbidities**

✓ **Course/duration of treatment**

✓ **Concurrent therapies**

✓ **Change in family/school/environment**

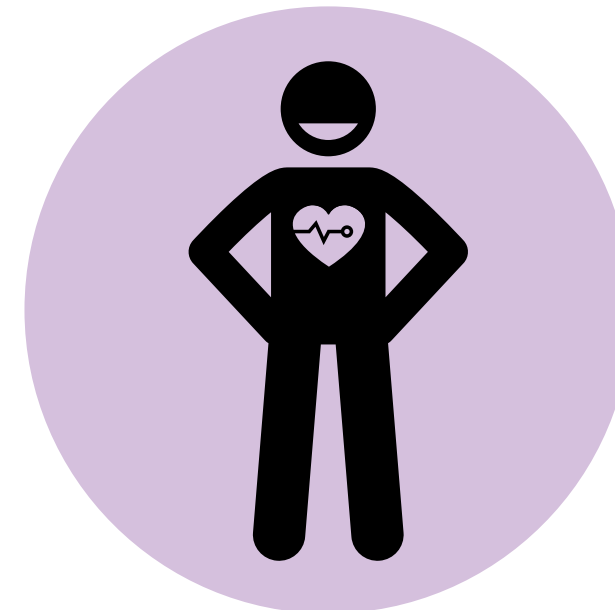
Discontinuation during a relatively stress-free period

Monitoring - SSRIs

No specific monitoring recommendations

Citalopram and

Escitalopram are contraindicated with other medicines known to prolong QTc interval



Anxiety

Anxiety disorders are **among the most common** psychiatric disorders in children and adolescents

Nearly **7% of youths** worldwide have an anxiety disorder

Median age of onset is **11 years**



Medicines in Anxiety

SSRIs - for moderate-to-severe illness

Sertraline - for obsessive compulsive disorder
(6-17 years)

Duration of Treatment in Anxiety

Continue for approximately **12 months** after remission



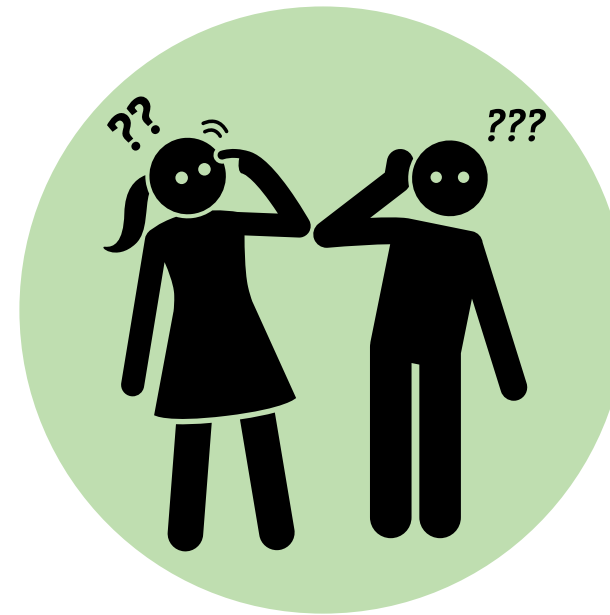
Monitor for re-emergence of symptoms for several months after discontinuation

Severe and chronic anxiety may require **longer treatment duration**

Discontinuation during a relatively stress-free period

Psychosis

About **12%** of **psychotic disorders** and **8%** of **schizophrenia** cases have **onset in childhood**



Schizophrenia spectrum disorders often first present during **adolescence** - **rarely in childhood**

Medicines in Psychosis

Second generation antipsychotics - choice determined by values and preferences of the individual with regard to side-effects

Aripiprazole - lowest risk of hyperprolactinaemia and cardiometabolic side-effects

OR

Asenapine - low risk of hyperprolactinaemia and medium risk cardiometabolic side-effects

OR

Ziprasidone - medium risk of hyperprolactinaemia and low risk cardiometabolic side-effects

Medicines in Psychosis

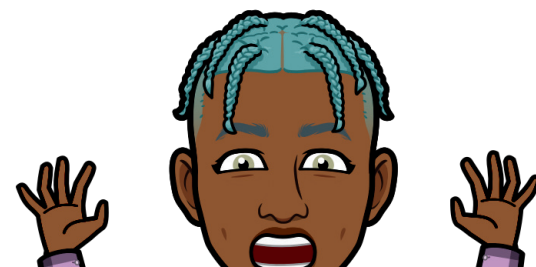
Risperidone - high risk of hyperprolactinaemia and medium risk of cardiometabolic side-effects

Olanzapine medium risk of hyperprolactinaemia and high risk of cardiometabolic side-effects

Side-effects - Aripiprazole



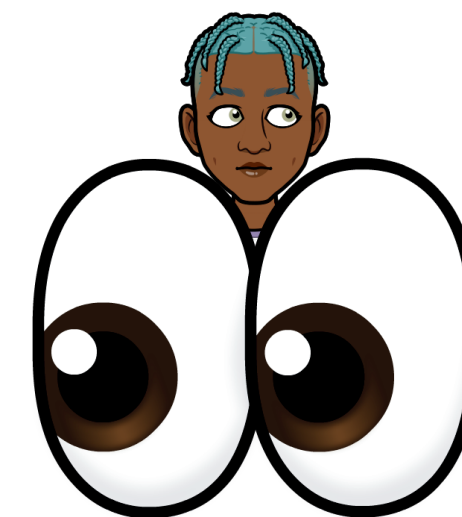
Feeling
restless



Shaky
hands



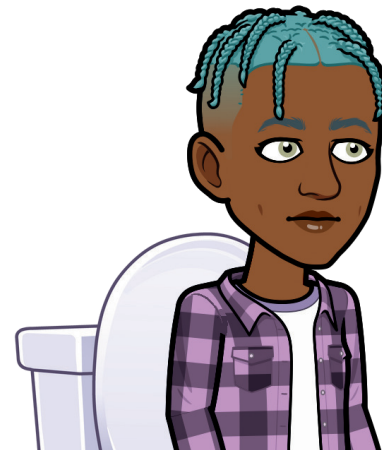
Trouble
sleeping



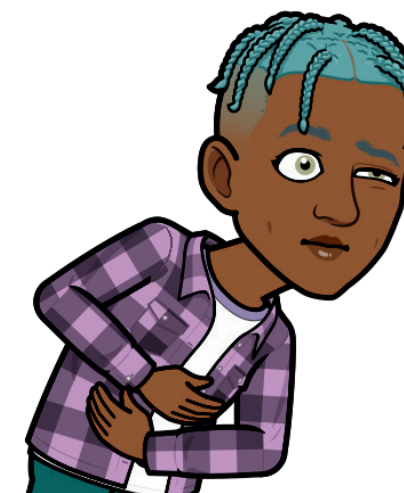
Blurred
vision



Headache

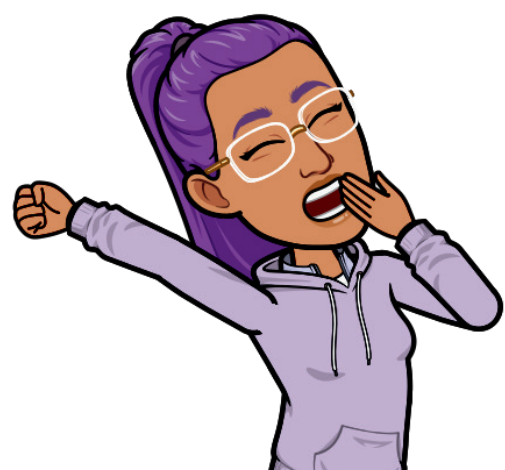


Constipation

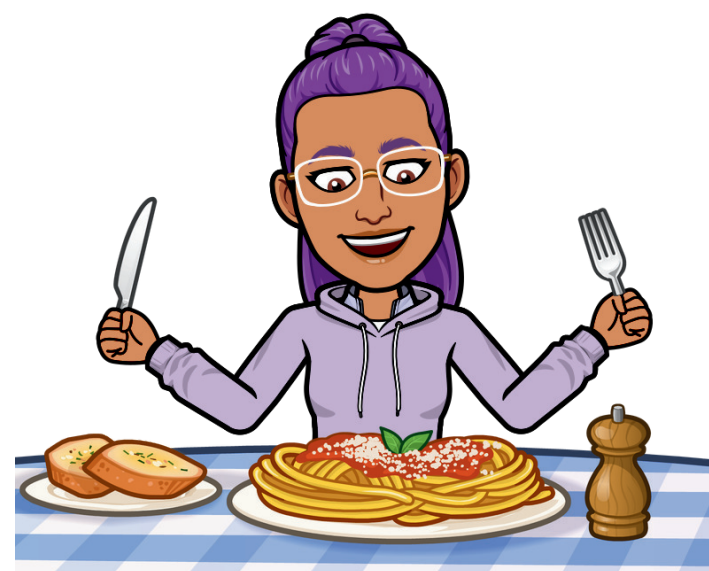


Stomach
ache

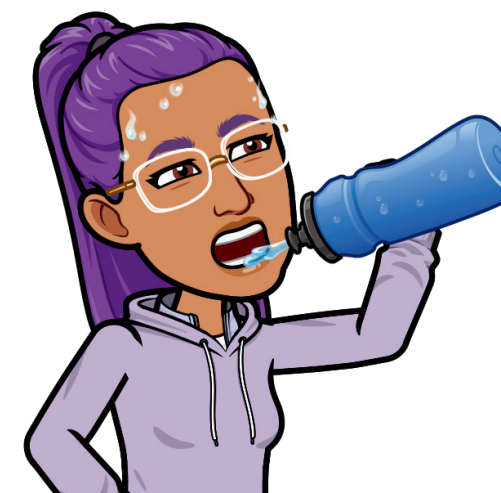
Side-effects - Olanzapine



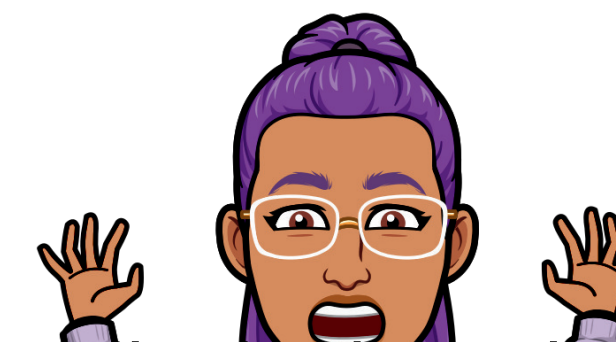
Drowsiness



Increased
Appetite



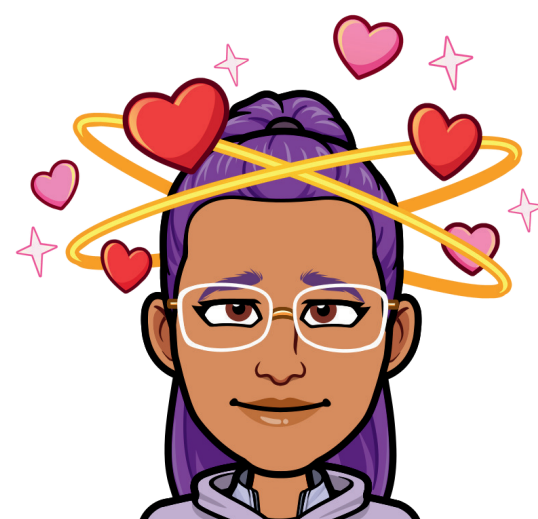
Dry mouth



Shaky hands



Constipation



Dizziness

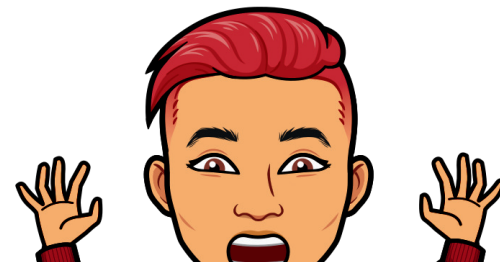


Stiff muscles

Side-effects - Risperidone



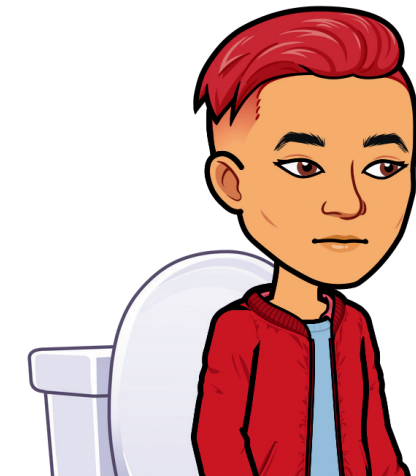
Stiff
muscles



Shaky
hands



Feeling
restless



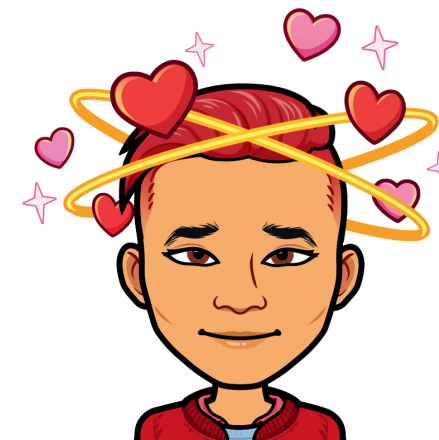
Constipation



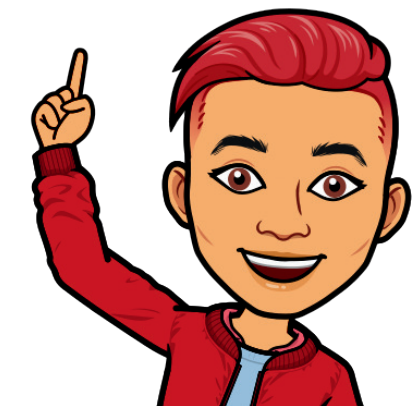
Drowsiness



Increased
Appetite

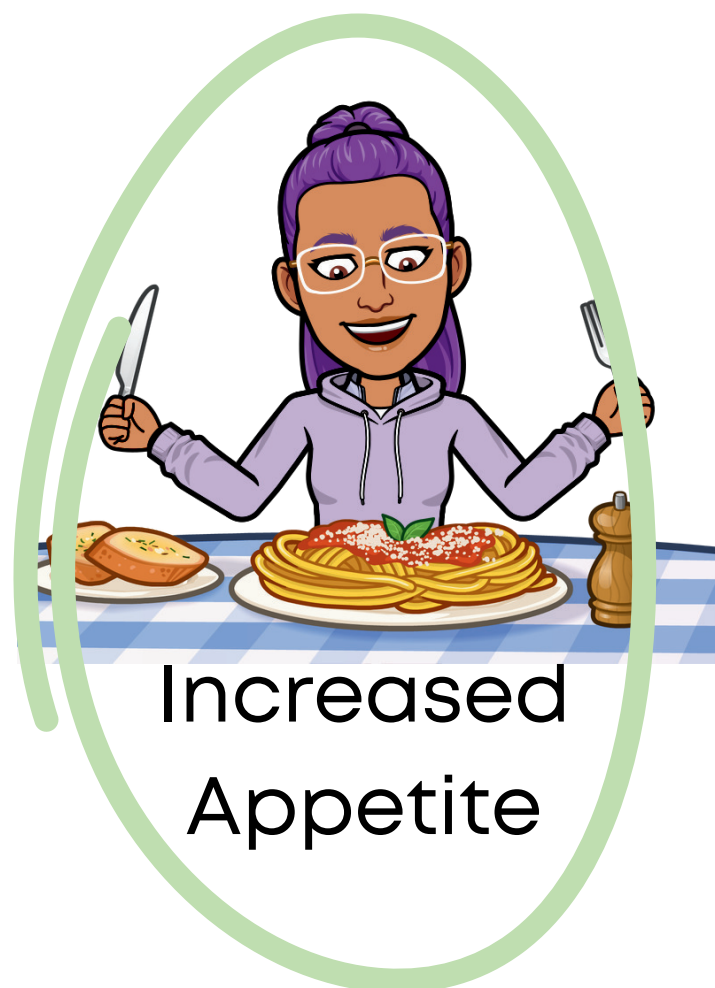


Dizziness



Increased
prolactin
(hormone)

Side-effect Support



1 in 7 young people gains **7% or more** body weight during the first 6 weeks

Checking weight weekly for **6-8 weeks** will help spot this early

Try and eat a healthy and varied diet that includes lots of **vegetables and protein**

Avoid sugary or processed foods and fizzy or fruit drinks or eating late at night

Moderate exercise like strength/resistance training for **30 minutes** at least **5 times a week**

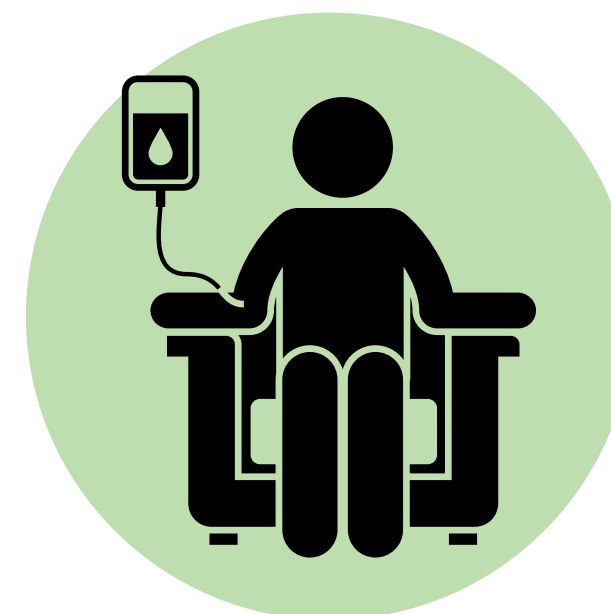
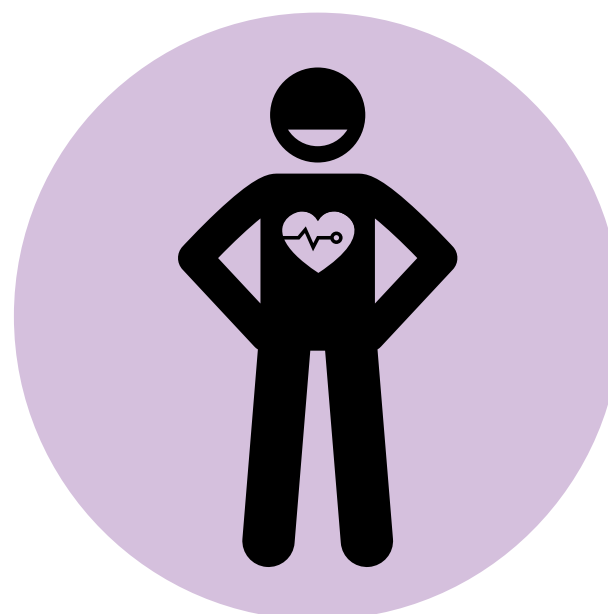
Duration of Treatment in Psychosis



Antipsychotic treatment should be continued for 1-2 years after remission of symptoms

Monitoring - Antipsychotics

Monitoring	Weight BMI	BP Pulse	ECG	FBC/ CBC	U+Es LFTs	HbA1c/ Glucose	Plasma Lipids	Prolactin	Side- effects
At Baseline	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Use GASS/BARS at 2 weeks
At 1 Month	Weekly x 6-8								
At 3 Months	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
6 Monthly	And 3-monthly thereafter	✓				✓	✓	✓	And 3-monthly thereafter
Annually			✓	✓	✓				



Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder usually starts between **age 15-25 years**
- extremely rare in young children

Prevalence is estimated at **2.9%**

Prevalence is **higher for females** (3.3%) than
for males (2.6%)



Medicines in Bipolar Disorder

Aripiprazole - Moderate to severe manic episodes in adolescents with bipolar I

Fluoxetine + **Olanzapine** - Moderate to severe bipolar depression

THEN

Quetiapine

THEN

Lamotrigine

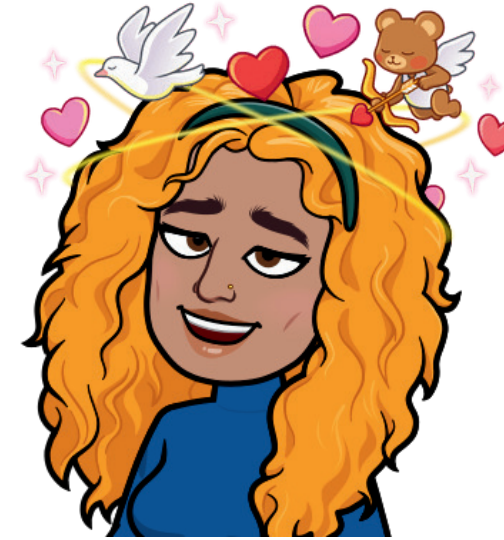
Side-effects - Quetiapine



Drowsiness



Headache



Dizziness



Unusual
dreams



Dry mouth



Increased
Appetite



Feeling
restless

Duration of Treatment in Bipolar

Antipsychotic treatment should not be routinely continued for longer than **12 weeks**

Medicine may be needed longer term for maintenance therapy given the chronic nature of the illness



ADHD

One of the **most common** childhood neurobehavioral conditions

Approximately **8-10%** of children aged 4-17 have ADHD



Thought to be under-recognised in **girls and women**

Medicines in ADHD

Methylphenidate - First line for children >5 years and young people with ADHD

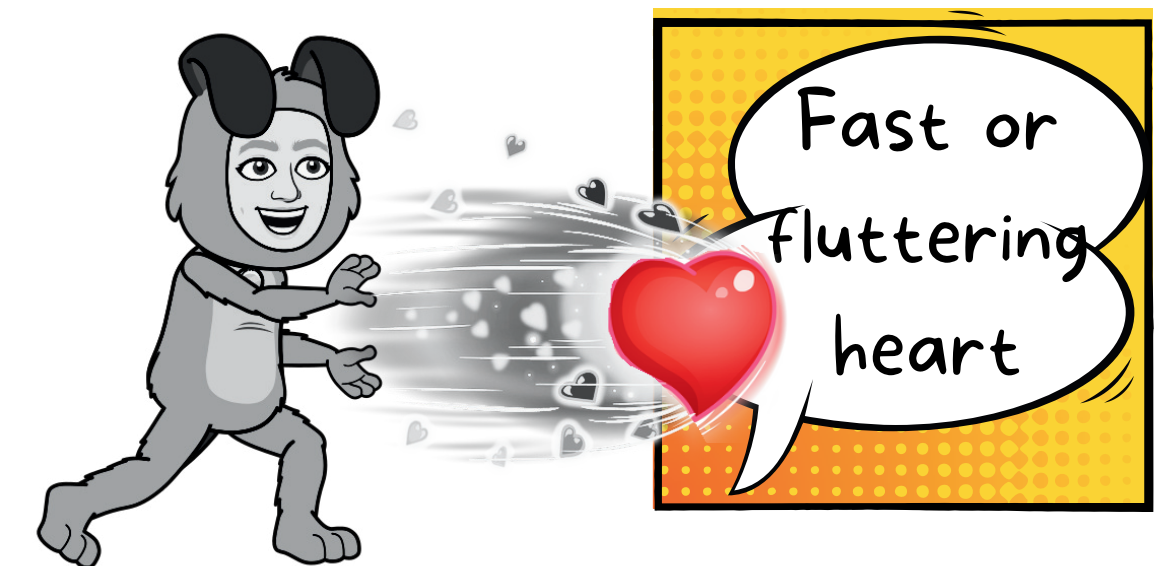
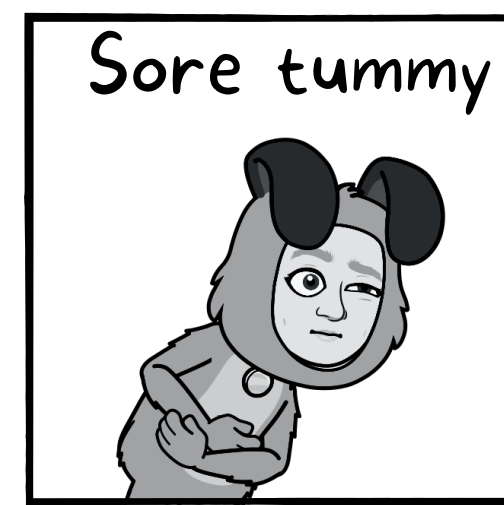
Lisdexamfetamine - Second line for children >5 years and young people following a 6-week trial of methylphenidate at an adequate dose

Atomoxetine OR

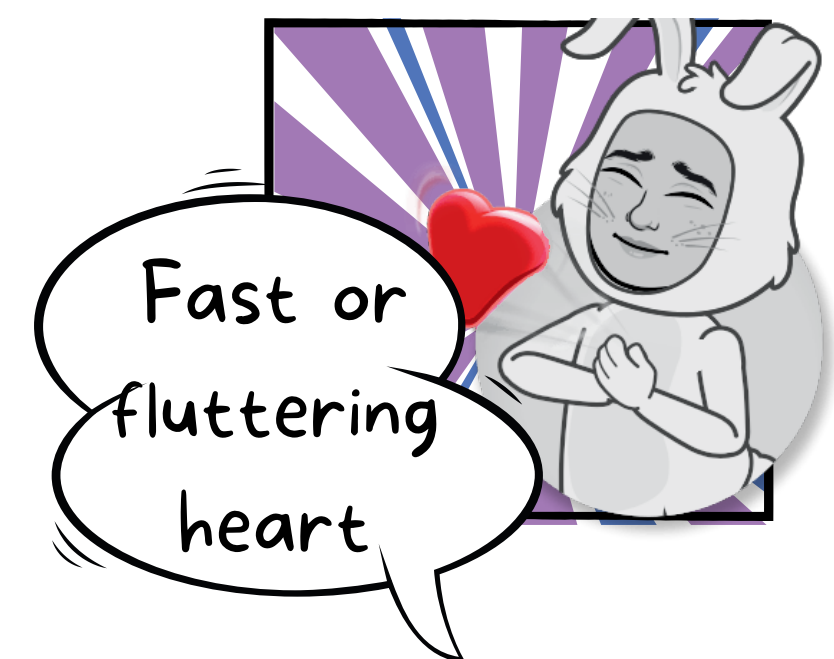
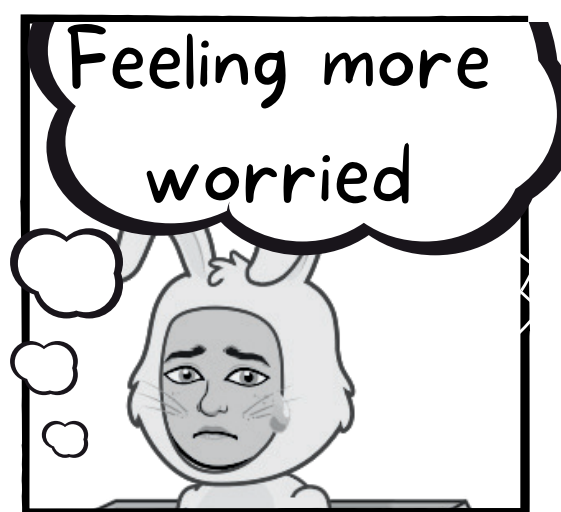
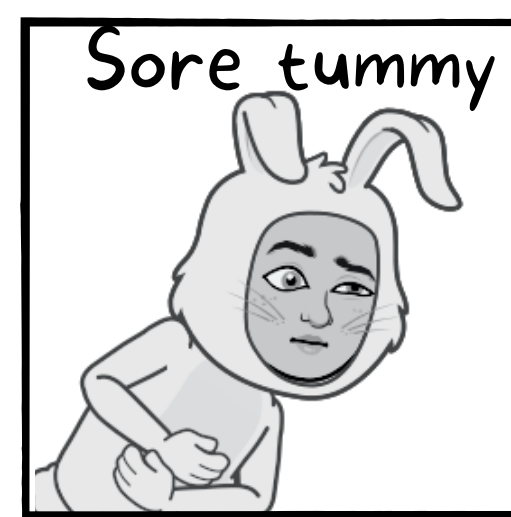
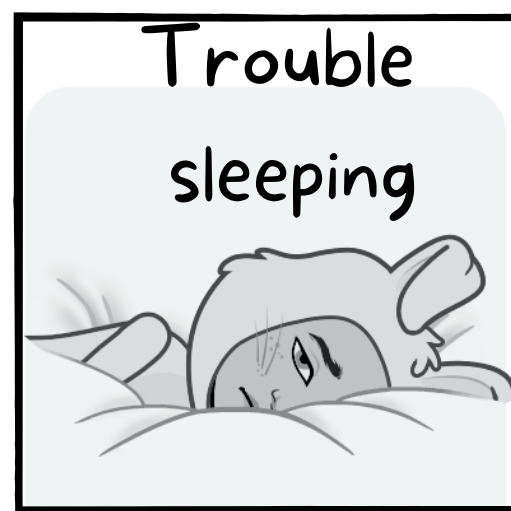
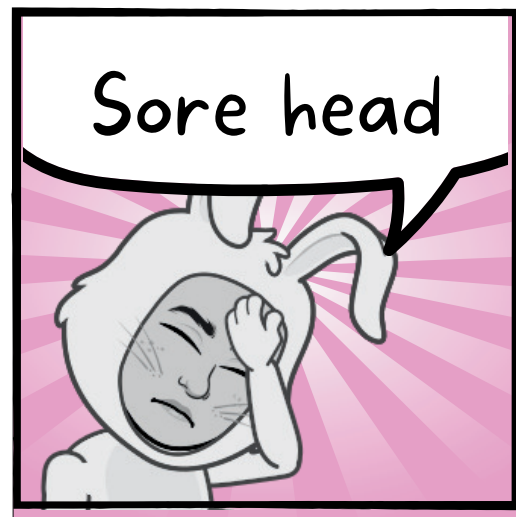
Guanfacine - aged >5 years and young people if:

- They can't tolerate a stimulant
- Symptoms have not responded to separate 6-week trials of both stimulants

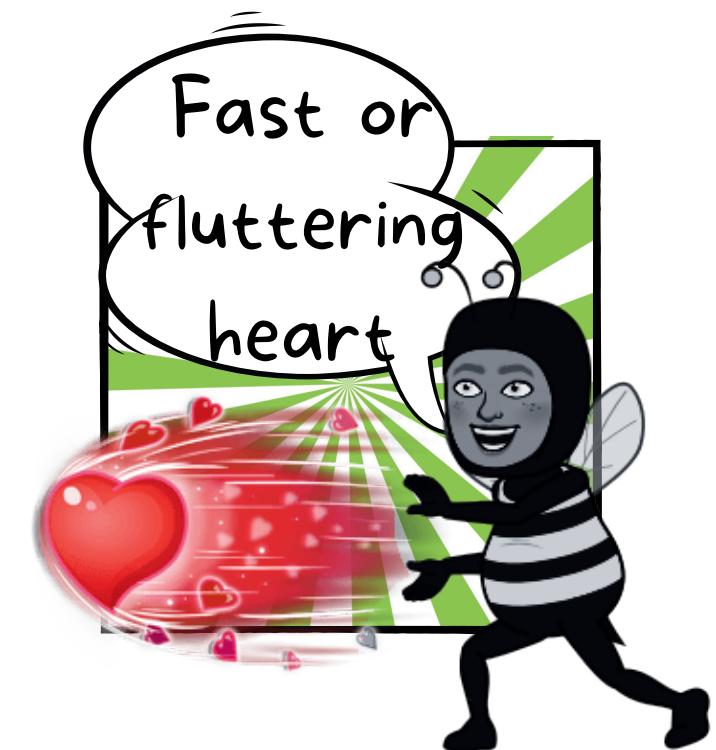
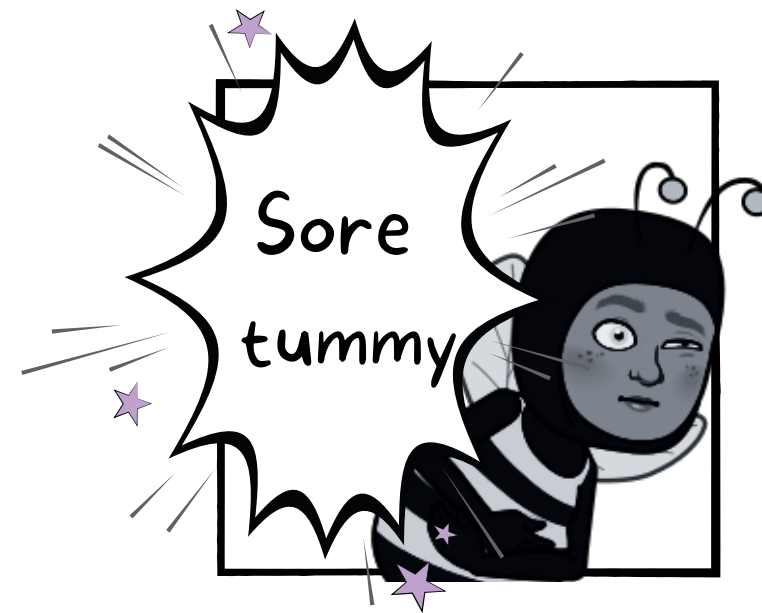
Side-effects - Methylphenidate



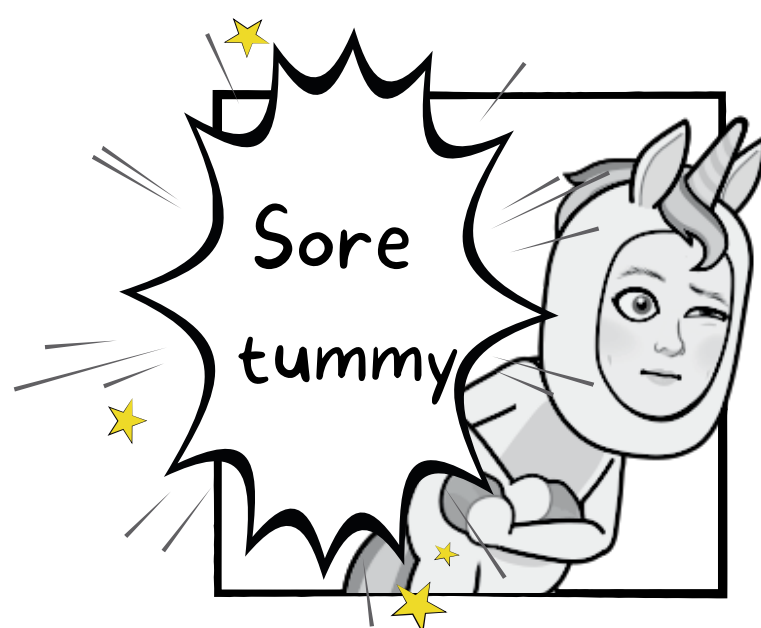
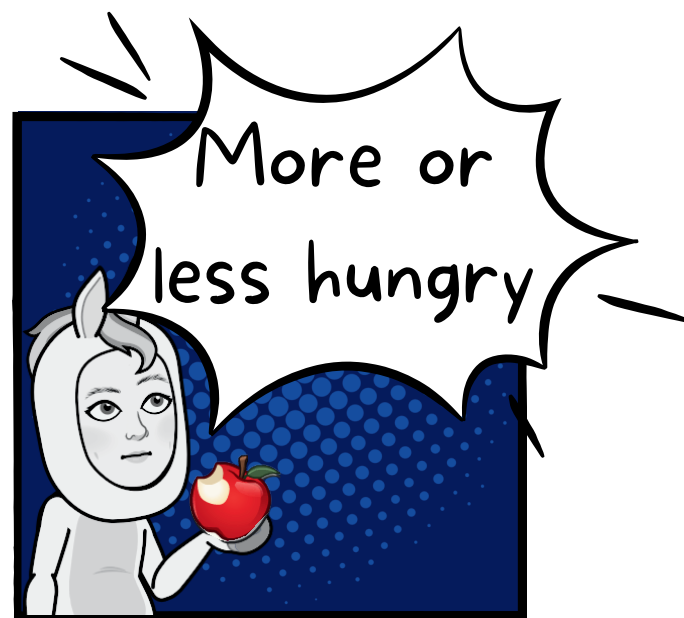
Side-effects - Lisdexamfetamine



Side-effects - Atomoxetine



Side-effects - Guanfacine



Side-effect Support

Happens to **1 in 5** young people

Checking weight and height regularly will make sure growth is tracked

Eat a big breakfast with or before you take the medicine including foods with protein

Set **reminders** to eat and choose foods that have **more calories**

Plan meals and snacks for the evening time



Duration of Treatment in ADHD

Annual review of medicine

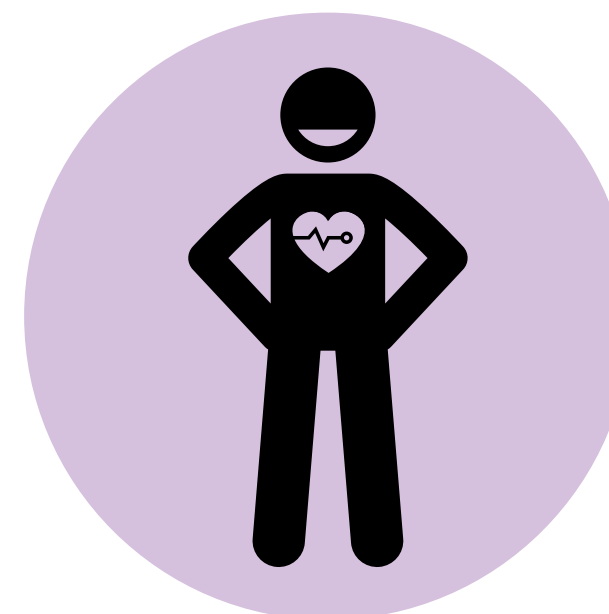
‘Drug Holidays’ may be indicated for those who experience loss of appetite



Consider trial periods of stopping medicine or reducing the dose when assessment of the overall balance of benefits and harms suggests this may be appropriate

Monitoring - Stimulants

Monitoring	Weight	Height	BP Pulse	ECG	Side-effects
At Baseline	✓	✓	✓		✓ Use rating scale
At 1 Month			After every dose change	Only if clinically indicated	
At 3 Months	✓				✓
6 Monthly	And 3-monthly thereafter	✓	✓		Regularly thereafter
Annually					



Eating Disorders

Anorexia nervosa (**AN**), bulimia nervosa (**BN**), binge eating disorder (**BED**), eating disorder NOS

Eating disorders are among the **most life-threatening** of all mental health conditions



Prevalence in children and adolescents (**11-19 years**) between **1.2% (boys)** and **5.7% (girls)**, with increasing incidence over recent decades

Medicines in Eating Disorders

Olanzapine - growing evidence for the possible benefit from olanzapine in the treatment of **AN**

Aripiprazole - less evidence but may help with over-valued ideas and food rituals in **AN**

Fluoxetine - high dose (60mg/day) for **BN**

Topiramate - shown to be effective well tolerated in **BN**

Lisdexamfetamine - Some evidence for acute treatment and relapse prevention in **BED**

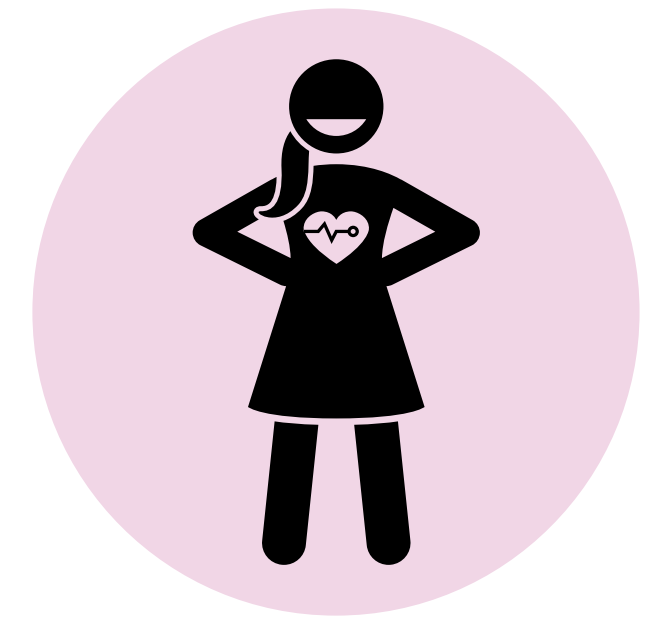
SSRIs - good indications of efficacy in **BED**

Physical Health Monitoring - ED

As per medicine

Due to **cardiac risks** secondary to malnutrition and electrolyte abnormalities secondary to malnutrition or purging

Hypokalaemia can further prolong **QTc interval** as well as causing arrhythmia in its own right



ECG



Duration of Treatment - Eating Disorder

Unclear duration of antipsychotic for **AN** - 6 months?

Treatment for 2-years with fluoxetine
has been recommended for **BN**

Unclear duration of treatment for **BED**



Information resources



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www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk



www.bap.org.uk

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health medicines for young people

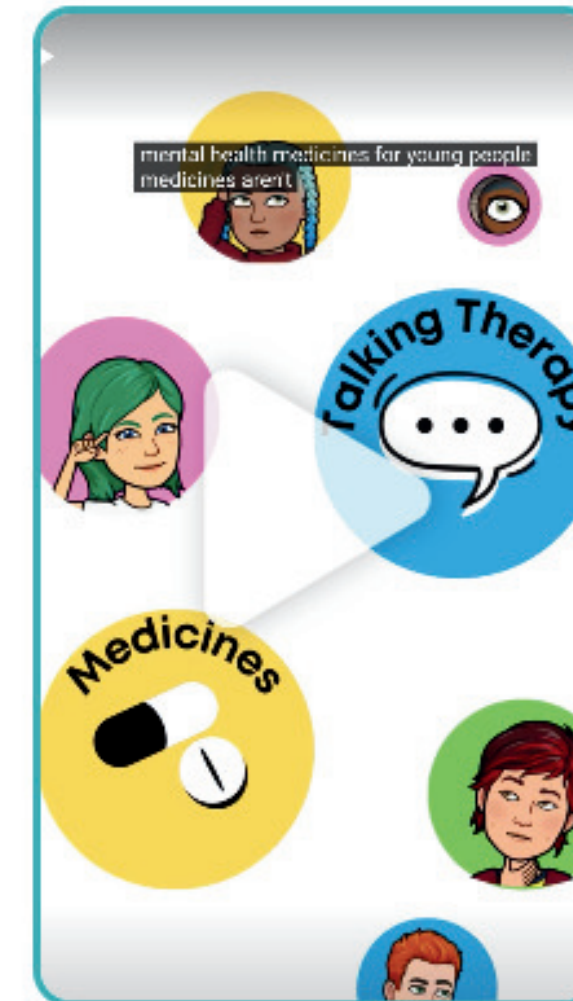
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Youth Med.Info is a source of reliable information on the most commonly used mental health medicines for young people.

Youth Med.info  is targeted at children and their parents/guardians.

Take a look at our explainer video or click on any of the icons below to find out more about each medicine.



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