

Q & A Mindline



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Q I have been on medication for depression and anxiety for the last three years. The psychiatrist I consulted prescribed about seven medications for mood disturbance, anger problems, sleep issues, anxiety and weakness. I feel sleepy all day and have little energy to get on with my life. Often, I am afflicted with constipation and feel bloated. When and how do I stop this medication?

You seem to suffer from the side effects of an excessive and overzealous medicinal regime. Thus, I think it's important you see an alternative specialist who can thoroughly review your initial and current difficulties (if any) with view to establish a diagnosis, along with response to the current medication and consider the need to alter doses and/or switch or stop unnecessary medicine.

Also, contrary to the misinformed common notion, most emotional and psychiatric disorders do not require lifelong medicines and the need for it has to be evaluated regularly and on a case to case basis. Long-term medicine(s) are considered when there

have been frequent relapses of illness. Multiple medicines with combination drugs in each tablet significantly raises the risk of side effects and cross interaction, which then contributes to suffering associated with underlying illness adding to pessimism. It also adds to the stigma of mental health problems and patients often report the fear that, 'once you get on medicine, then it's for life'- this notion leads to avoidance and delay of a much needed consultation, which is the first step to recovery.

See a conservative qualified specialist who is also trained in psychotherapy (talk therapy) and who will prescribe a minimal required medicine for a carefully considered duration. Those medicines will add value to the psychological intervention and its aim will be to aid recovery rather than to medicalize the ailment.

As a patient, always question the need for suggested tablets, its side effects and the duration you are likely to be on them. After all, consultation is a two-way process and questioning must be an important part of it.

Q My husband is oversensitive and constantly surfs the internet for health issues. He then worries more and wants to see different doctors for investigations to address his concerns. We have visited several doctors over the last two years and have spent a lot of money. Please advise.

Information on the internet escalates concerns about common problems followed by undue worries and frequent unsatisfactory visits to doctors and/or demands for major further investigation despite negative results.

In modern times, this state is termed cyberchondria, which can be anything from a temporary neurotic excess to an adjunct underlying hypochondriacal

disorder (health phobia). There is a higher tendency of cyberchondria in someone who has an anxious personality and/or suffering from stressors.

One should be aware that anxiety has bodily manifestations. For example, palpitations and shortness of breath may seem like someone is having a heart problem. And in an anxious person, such bodily manifestation can further escalate anxiety followed by a search for answers or a consultation to get assurances, often in vain. Thus, it's important to understand the vicious cycle of anxiety.

Trends in clinical practice are changing as physicians and health care practitioners are now referring many with similar complaints to a psychiatrist for further evaluation and helping a person understand the implications of compulsively searching on the internet about particular real or imagined symptoms of illness. While initial investigation for bodily ailments is warranted, repeated ones are not helpful.

When investigations are negative and physical health concerns are unfounded, then it is necessary and appropriate to use the counselling line - 'while you suffer from some bodily features, the good news is that it doesn't point to any bodily ailment. In other words, there is no known hardware (body) issue and it would seem that the software (mind) is what needs looking into, followed by bug fixing and updating.' This goes down very well as it's the language we all totally understand these days.

Equally, all must read on specific diagnosis, treatment and outcomes of problems from specific websites and URLs only after consultation, so they are better informed and effectively engage with intervention. Remember, the internet is a vast space with uncontrolled and variable information. So, be careful what you read, especially when it concerns matters of your health.