

Medicines To Treat Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a severe, long-lasting (chronic) brain disease that affects major areas of everyday life. Schizophrenia can cause you to hear voices or have thoughts that other people are trying to read your mind, control your thoughts or cause you harm. Symptoms of schizophrenia can change over time.

Schizophrenia occurs equally among men and women. Men are usually affected in their late teens or early 20s. Women are usually affected in their 20s to early 30s. Although rare, young children older than age 5 can develop schizophrenia. Symptoms can include:

- hallucinations — seeing visions, feeling things or hearing voices that do not really exist. Hearing voices is the most common type of hallucination. These voices may give orders, carry on conversations or give warnings of danger.
- delusions — being unable to separate real from unreal experiences. You may have false beliefs that you are being watched, harassed or targeted (paranoia). You may also have delusions of grandeur. These are false beliefs of power or fame such as being president. You may believe ordinary objects are being used against you.
- thinking disorder — having rapid thoughts and being unable to think clearly. You can have problems concentrating and focusing your attention. You can jump from topic to topic and speak so quickly you do not seem to make sense.
- withdrawal — wanting to be left alone.

How Your Brain Responds to Schizophrenia

Neurotransmitters are substances in your brain that carry messages (nerve impulses) from one nerve cell to another. In schizophrenia, there is an imbalance in the neurotransmitters such as dopamine and serotonin.

With schizophrenia, too many neurotransmitters are produced. As a result, you may hear voices inside your head and have disorganized thinking.

When Medicines May Be Prescribed

Medicines can be helpful in treating schizophrenia by decreasing extra neurotransmitters in the brain. Medicines only help relieve symptoms. They do not cure schizophrenia. Your mental health provider may prescribe different medicines before finding the right one for you. Medicines include halperidol (Haldol[®]), fluphenzine (Prolixin[®]), clozapine (Clozaril[®]), risperidone (Risperdal[®]), aripiprazole (Abilify[®]), quetiapine (Seroquel[®]) and olanzapine (Zyprexa[®]).

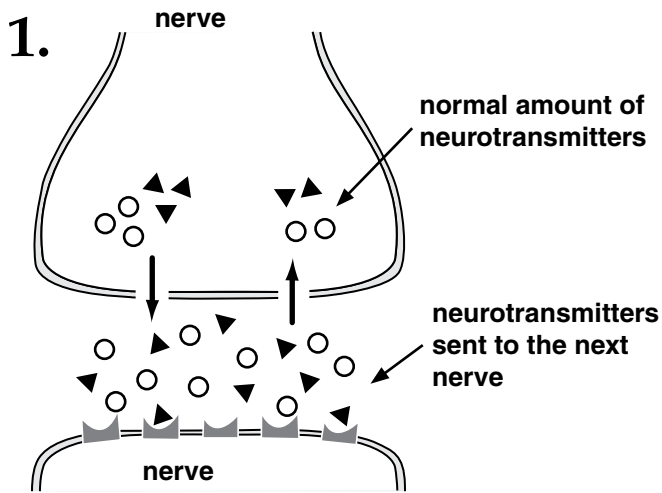
How Antipsychotic Medicines Work

Antipsychotic medicines are used to decrease (“normalize”) the amount of neurotransmitters in the brain, which helps reduce symptoms.

They do not cause addictive behavior but some have side effects (dry mouth, upset stomach, drowsiness, restlessness, muscle spasms, weight gain) that make them hard to take. Your health care provider will choose the right medicine and schedule for you. **Make sure to take your medicine as directed, even if you start feeling better.**

(over)

How the brain reacts in schizophrenia

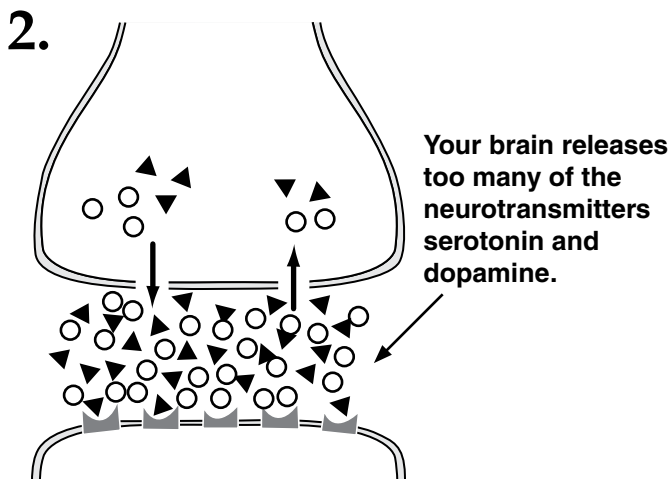


All drawings © Allina Health System

Neurotransmitters are chemicals that send brain messages from one nerve to another. They are stored in nerve endings.

When there is a balance of neurotransmitters, the nerve is able to send a normal message to the next nerve.

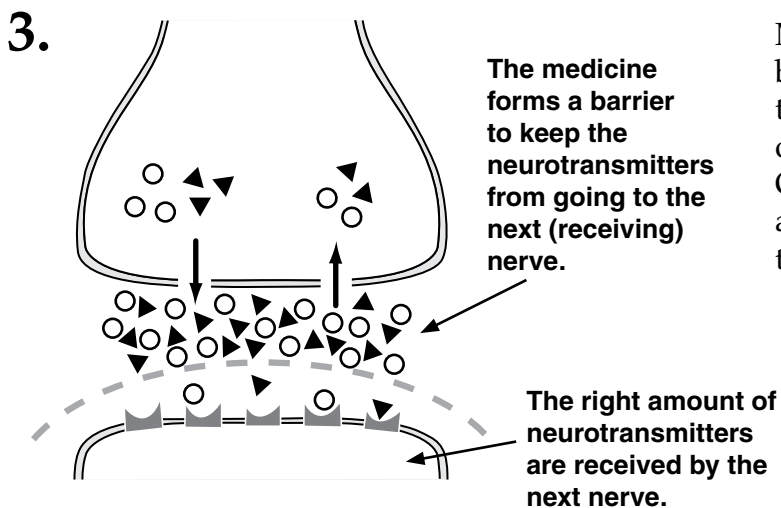
How the brain reacts in schizophrenia



With schizophrenia, your brain releases more neurotransmitters than usual. Too much dopamine and serotonin are produced. This imbalance causes the messages to be sent abnormally between nerves.

As a result, you may not be able to think clearly and you may see or hear things that do not exist. Your mind may play tricks on you. It will be hard to concentrate.

How antipsychotic medicine helps



Medicine to treat schizophrenia works by blocking the extra neurotransmitters from the next (receiving) nerve. As a result, levels of dopamine and serotonin are decreased. Only a normal amount of neurotransmitters are passed along. The brain chemistry is back to normal levels of dopamine and serotonin.