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Common Medications For Anxiety And Panic Attacks

Question: “Hi, I have found your emails fairly helpful do you have any information on drugs for depression and anxiety?”

Answer:

I am not an expert on psychotropic drugs but can provide a brief overview of some of the main drugs used for anxiety and panic attacks. You should be discussing medications and side-effects with a doctor who is able to discuss them in more detail and prescribe such things.

Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) are a newer class of anti-depressant which began with Prozac (fluoxetine). These drugs work differently than traditional antidepressants and by helping the brain maintain levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin which is often found to be low in sufferers of depression, OCD and anxiety and panic disorders.

Benzodiazepines are minor tranquilizers. They have been over prescribed over the years for stress and for a sleep aid. They might be useful at the beginning of one’s treatment, prior to the other medications taking effect, (i.e. SSRIs) to relax one if their anxiety and panic is strong enough. However they are extremely habit forming and the danger is that it may make it extremely harder for one to learn to how to deal with their anxiety with any other means, other than medication.

Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors (MAOIs) are a group of antidepressant drugs. Researchers believe MAOIs function by preventing the enzyme monoamine oxidase from metabolizing the neurotransmitters norepinephrine, serotonin and dopamine in the brain. MAOIs were the first antidepressants developed but later were replaced by tricyclic and tetracyclic antidepressants because MAOIs require one to follow a very strict diet due to adverse interactions that can take place between the drug and various foods.

What I really would like to discuss is actually my philosophy on medications. This by no means is just my philosophy but many.

What I’ve found from my research in this area and my own personal experience is that there are some people who seem to need medication through anxiety and some who do not.

The best way to approach using medication, if you find yourself among this group, is from the standpoint that the medication is simply there to help you while learn how you to deal with your panic attacks naturally by various techniques.

You see I had bad anxiety and did seem to need medications. At the time, I was seeing a good psychologist who impressed upon me the need to be able to operate independently from medication by learning techniques so that I would not become dependent.

I was also seeing a physician who was not prepared to simply write a prescription for a tranquilizer or other medication for anxiety relief. I was out of town at the time but called to make an appointment with his office. I spoke to his secretary about my desperate state and was of course told that I would need to come in for an appointment, which I did.

The first thing he did was to refer me to a psychologist before going ahead and prescribing medication. Once he received a letter indicating I was suffering from panic attacks he did provide me with a prescription for Paxil - an SSRI (discussed above).

Although it did not seem like it at the time, the above practitioners' approaches were actually a great benefit for me.

When I think back, although I was extremely anxious and uncomfortable at the time, at least this doctor did not instantly reach for his prescription pad. Had he immediately provided me with a tranquilizer I might have become extremely dependent on them. I may have become dependent on whatever medication he prescribed without allowing me to have the additional help from a psychologist that I needed.

Luckily at the same time the psychologist I was seeing was very much interested in helping me learn to cope and deal with panic attacks and anxiety without having to rely on medication.

Unfortunately sometimes folks see doctors who may operate purely from a biological model that says that says body chemistry is the basis for your anxiety and panic attacks. Doctors may over prescribe medications and do not necessarily have the ability to do any type of medical counseling and may instead simply reach for the prescription pad.

I know that not everyone will find themselves having to take medication and that's great. But if you do fall into this category, and if you go back and digest the information in this installment, I hope you can approach taking medication for anxiety and panic attacks from what I believe is the correct frame of reference.

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