

Aripiprazole

Aripiprazole (Abilify) treats depression, anxiety, agitation, paranoia, and hallucinations. It is one of the best-studied options for helping antidepressants work better in non-bipolar depression.

It improves bipolar mania and mixed states, which are common causes of irritability, agitation, anxiety, insomnia, racing thoughts, distraction and impulsivity.

It belongs to a class of medications that differ widely in their side effects and benefits. Among these medications, aripiprazole stands out for its relative lack of weight gain and fatigue.

Aripiprazole can take up to 2-3 weeks to work fully but can bring benefits after a few days.

How should I take it?

Aripiprazole can be taken once a day with or without food. Aripiprazole's benefits build up gradually in the brain and are not impacted by the time of day you take it. If it makes you drowsy you should take it in the evening, otherwise the effects of the medication are not impacted by the time of day it is taken.

It's a good idea to link the time you take aripiprazole with a daily routine that you already have in place, such as showering or brushing your teeth. Store the medicine near that routine and take it at the same time so you can build on habits you've already developed.

What if I forget a dose?

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember it. However, if it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose and continue your regular dosing schedule. Do not take a double dose to make up for a missed one.

How long do I need to take it?

This depends on your diagnosis and which other medications you are taking. Most people with bipolar disorder need to stay on at least one mood stabilizer for the long term in order to prevent mood swings. If aripiprazole helped,

Key Points

1. Aripiprazole can be taken in the day or night (drowsiness is rare).
2. There are several rare, but serious, side effects with aripiprazole (diabetes, high cholesterol, tardive dyskinesia, compulsive spending or gambling).
3. Lower those risks by checking weight before and after starting it and using the app [tdscreen.ai](#) (see inside).

it is best to stay on it for at least 6 months before considering going off it. That gives the brain time to build up habits of stability.

What happens if I stop it?

Aripiprazole is unique in that it comes out of your system gradually (over one week) after stopping it.

Aripiprazole is not addictive and does not cause withdrawal symptoms. If you plan to come off aripiprazole, it is best to do so slowly (over at least 2 weeks) as that will lower the chance of sudden mood swings returning.

Checking labs

It is a good idea to check for diabetes and high cholesterol while taking aripiprazole. This medication, as well as bipolar disorder itself, increases the risk of these conditions.

Side effects

The most common side effects are nausea and an uncomfortable restless feeling called *akathisia*. Weight gain and tiredness are rare.

If you don't tolerate the medication, try cutting your dose in half until the side effects get better and then raising it up.

These side effects tend to improve with time or by lowering the dose:

Nausea, tiredness, restlessness, muscle aches or stiffness.

Preventing weight gain

We can prevent weight gain on this med if we know that you're at risk. Here's how to tell. Weigh yourself carefully before starting it and again one month later (use the same scale, check in morning, naked, before eating and after going to the bathroom).

If you gain weight in the first month, there are several options to prevent the problem. As a first step, here is a nutrition plan that improves mood, causes weight loss, and has no calorie counting:

www.chrisaikenmd.com/antidepressantdiet

Medical risks

Compulsive gambling: Rarely, aripiprazole increases the urge to gamble or spend money.

Low blood pressure: Aripiprazole can cause blood pressure to drop when you stand up (leading to dizziness or falls). You can reduce this risk by standing up slowly.

Metabolic Changes: Aripiprazole can increase the risk of diabetes and high cholesterol. This risk is lower with aripiprazole than with other antipsychotics.

Tardive Dyskinesia: With long term use, this med may cause involuntary movements, such as twitching in the face, hands, or other muscles. This condition can be treated but sometimes it is not reversible. We will check for movements while you are on it, and you can prevent it

further by using the tdcheck.ai app every few months. It detects early signs of the problem better than doctors.

Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome: This syndrome, which is extremely rare on aripiprazole, consists of sudden, severe muscle stiffness, fever and irregular pulse and blood pressure.

Akathisia

This side effect is a feeling of inner restlessness that makes it very uncomfortable to sit still. It is not dangerous and may improve with time or a lower dose.

Akathisia can be relieved with several medications including propranolol, vitamin B6, betaxolol, pramipexole, gabapentin, trazodone, and mirtazapine.

Use in Dementia: Aripiprazole can increase the risk of death when used in older adults with dementia. This effect is not seen in people without dementia and may be related to brain-changes that dementia brings.

Pregnancy: Aripiprazole has not been adequately studied in pregnancy. It does pass through breast milk.

Interactions

Recreational drugs: Alcohol (in excess of 2 glasses/day) and recreational drugs can prevent aripiprazole from working.

Other medications: These web sites help you check for drug interactions. You should talk with us about the information you find as many drug interactions have only a mild effect:

reference.medscape.com/drug-interactionchecker

How to store and dispose of medication

- Keep out of the reach of children.
- Store away from heat, direct light and damp places.

- To safely dispose of unwanted pills: Do not pour in the toilet or sink (it will enter the water supply). To prevent children or pets from eating it, mix unwanted pills in a bag with water and inedible trash (such as coffee grounds) and throw in the garbage.

Cost and insurance coverage

Aripiprazole is available generic. If you do not have insurance, you may find low-cost out-of-pocket options at www.goodrx.com.

—Chris Aiken, MD, updated 6/26/2025

Aripiprazole

Brand	Abilify
Dose range	Depression: 2-5mg/day Mania/mixed state: 10-30mg/day Schizophrenia: 10-30mg/day
Sizes	Tabs: 2, 5, 10, 15, 20, 30mg Dispersible tabs: 10, 15mg
Release date	11/15/2002
FDA-approval	Non-bipolar depression (when taken with an antidepressant), bipolar mania and mixed states, schizophrenia, irritability due to autism

Comparison of Atypical Antipsychotics

		Unipolar Depression	Bipolar Depression	Mania & Mixed States	Schizophrenia	Irritability in Autism	OCD	Borderline Personality	Weight Gain	Tiredness	Restlessness
Generic	Asenapine (Saphris)		□	■	■				↑	↑↑	↑
	Aripiprazole (Abilify)	◆		■	■	■	□	□	↑	↑↑	↑↑
	Olanzapine (Zyprexa, Symbax)	◆	◆	■	■		□	□	↑↑↑	↑↑	↑↑
	Paliperidone (Invega)				■		□		↑	↑	↑
	Risperidone (Risperdal)	◇		■	■	■	□	□	↑	↑↑	↑↑↑
	Quetiapine (Seroquel)	◆	■	■	■		□	□	↑↑	↑↑↑	—
	Ziprasidone (Geodon)	◇		■	■				—	↑↑	—
Brand Only	Brexiprazole (Rexulti)	◆			■				↑	↑	—
	Cariprazine (Vraylar)	◇	■	■	■				↑	↑	↑↑↑
	Iloperidone (Fanapt)				■				↑↑	↑	—
	Lumateperone (Caplyta)		■		■				—	↑↑	—
	Lurasidone (Latuda)		■	□	■				↑	↑↑	↑↑
	Pimavanserin (Nuplazid)	◇			□				—	↑	—
<p>■ FDA-approved ◆ Approved when used with an antidepressant □ Works but not approved <i>Side effects</i> ↑↑↑ major ↑↑ moderate ↑ mild — rare</p>											

—Chris Aiken, MD, updated 4/22/2022