

# Coping with the side-effects of medication<sup>i</sup>

All drugs have unwanted effects. These vary from individual to individual and depend on the type of drug and dose given. Sometimes the side-effects disappear after a few days or weeks; other side-effects are more troublesome and persistent. It is very important to report to your doctor any unwanted effects the drug seems to be having. The unpleasant effects can often be eliminated, reduced in severity or made more tolerable by a range of simple strategies.

Strategies your doctor may suggest include:

- changing to a different medication
- decreasing the dose
- taking the drug in several, smaller doses spread through the day
- taking the medication with appropriate food
- taking extra medication to counteract the side-effects.

In addition, strategies that you can adopt yourself to deal with side-effects include the following:

<b>Side-effect</b>	<b>Strategy for coping with it</b>
<b>Appetite</b> (increase)	Eat a diet that is low in fat and high in fibre Avoid sugary or fatty foods Drink low-calorie soft drinks
<b>Constipation</b>	Increase exercise Increase fibre in diet Increase fluid intake
<b>Dizziness</b>	Get up slowly from lying or sitting Avoid excessively hot showers or baths Avoid alcohol, sedatives or other sedating drugs (eg marijuana)
<b>Drowsiness</b>	Take medication in a single dose before bedtime (talk to the doctor about this first). If you feel sleepy during the day, you should not drive or work with machinery.
<b>Dry mouth</b>	Ensure regular fluid intake Limit alcohol and caffeine (both enhance water loss) Use sugarless gums, fruit pastilles and lollies (sugar will promote dental decay) Suck on ice cubes If it is very bad, ask your doctor about artificial saliva (Luborant)
<b>Sensitivity to sunburn</b>	Avoid the midday sun Regularly use sunscreen and wear a hat, sunglasses and shirt Ask your doctor for a prescription for sunscreen

For more detailed information about individual drugs, see the drug information website for service users at <http://www.nmhc.co.uk>, read the book *Your Medication — Any Questions*, available from Norfolk Mental Health Care NHS Trust Pharmacy, Hellesdon Hospital, Norwich NR6 5BE.

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<sup>i</sup> Adapted from Andrews G, Jenkins R, eds. *Management of Mental Disorders (UK Edition)*. Sydney: World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, 1999. Distributed for the publishers in the UK by IN 2 Mail Ltd, Fax: +44 (0)1252 3622315; PO Box 55, Aldershot, Hampshire GU12 4FP.