

# Medications: Quick Reference

Plain-English definitions for every medications term on Shrinktionary, in one printable sheet.

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**Please read**

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## Akathisia

*Also: Inner restlessness*

Akathisia is a distressing sense of inner restlessness, often with a strong urge to keep moving. It's a side effect that can come from certain psychiatric medications and warrants prompt attention.

## Antidepressant

*Also: depression medication*

An antidepressant is a medication used to treat depression and many anxiety conditions. It's an umbrella term that covers several drug classes, including SSRIs and SNRIs.

## Antipsychotic

*Also: neuroleptic*

An antipsychotic is a medication used to treat psychosis and to help manage bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Some are also added to other treatments to boost their effect.

## Atypical Antidepressant

*Also: Other antidepressant*

An atypical antidepressant is a medication that treats depression but doesn't fit neatly into the older drug classes like SSRIs or tricyclics. These medications work through different chemical pathways in the brain.

## Augmentation

*Also: Add-on therapy, Adjunctive treatment*

Augmentation is the practice of adding a second medication to boost the effect of one that's only partly working. It's a way to improve a treatment without abandoning a drug that's helping a little.

## Benzodiazepine

*Also: Benzos*

Benzodiazepines are a class of fast-acting medications that calm the nervous system. They can quickly ease anxiety, panic, and insomnia, but carry a risk of dependence and are usually meant for short-term use.

## Beta-Blocker

*Also: Beta blocker, Beta-adrenergic blocker*

Beta-blockers are medications first developed for heart and blood pressure problems. In mental health they're sometimes used off-label to calm physical anxiety symptoms like a racing heart or shaky hands.

## Black Box Warning

*Also: Boxed warning, Black-box warning*

A black box warning is the strongest safety warning the FDA can put on a medication. It flags a serious possible risk, but it doesn't mean the drug is banned or that the risk happens to everyone.

## Discontinuation syndrome

*Also: Antidepressant discontinuation syndrome*

Discontinuation syndrome is the set of temporary symptoms that can appear when an antidepressant is stopped too quickly. It isn't addiction, and it's usually prevented by tapering the dose gradually with a prescriber.

## Half-Life

*Also: Elimination half-life*

Half-life is the time it takes for the amount of a drug in your body to drop by half. It helps explain how often a medication is taken and how long it lingers after the last dose.

## Lithium

*Also: lithium carbonate*

Lithium is a foundational mood stabilizer used to treat bipolar disorder. It needs regular blood monitoring, and the dose should never be adjusted on your own.

## MAOI

*Also: Monoamine oxidase inhibitor, MAOIs*

MAOI stands for monoamine oxidase inhibitor, one of the oldest classes of antidepressant. They can work well, but they require careful attention to diet and drug interactions, so they're usually reserved for when other treatments fail.

## Mood Stabilizer

*Also: mood-stabilizing medication*

A mood stabilizer is a medication used mainly in bipolar disorder to even out the highs and lows. Lithium is one of the best-known examples.

## Off-Label

*Also: Off-label use, Off-label prescribing*

Off-label means a doctor prescribes an approved medication for a use the FDA hasn't formally approved. It's common, legal, and often backed by real evidence and clinical experience.

## Polypharmacy

*Also: Multiple medications*

Polypharmacy means taking several medications at the same time. In mental health it usually refers to using more than one psychiatric drug together, which can help but also needs careful oversight.

## Serotonin Syndrome

*Also: Serotonin toxicity*

Serotonin syndrome is a potentially serious reaction caused by too much serotonin activity in the body, often from combining certain medications. It can range from mild to life-threatening and needs prompt medical attention.

## SNRI

*Also: Serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor*

SNRI stands for serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor. It's a class of antidepressant medications that adjust two brain chemicals at once and is used for depression, anxiety, and some pain conditions.

## SSRI

*Also: Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor*

SSRI stands for selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor. It's a class of medications used to treat depression, anxiety disorders, OCD, PTSD, and several other conditions by adjusting how serotonin moves between nerve cells.

## Stimulant

*Also: ADHD stimulant medication*

A stimulant is a medication that's a first-line treatment for ADHD. It helps with focus and impulse control and is a controlled substance managed closely by a prescriber.

## Tardive Dyskinesia

*Also: TD*

Tardive dyskinesia is a movement side effect that can develop after long-term use of certain medications, causing involuntary movements often in the face, mouth, or limbs. It warrants prompt attention from a prescriber.

## Tricyclic Antidepressant

*Also: TCA, TCAs*

Tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs) are an older class of antidepressant medication. They work but tend to cause more side effects than newer drugs, so they're often used after other options.

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