



## Over-Medicalising Psychological Difficulties and Considering Medication

Where it is justified, a medical diagnosis can be liberating. For the first time you might understand why you have trouble with thoughts and emotions and making sense of the world. For people who really need it, medication can be life-changing and life-saving.

However, there are risks associated with all medications. All medications have potential for side effects, and, once you start taking them, many psychiatric medications are very difficult to stop, especially if you have been on them for a long time.

**One note of caution: If you are on any medications, do not make any changes to them without talking to your doctor first. All changes to psychiatric medications MUST be done under the supervision of a qualified and registered (licensed) medical practitioner. Decisions to start medication or to not start medication if there is a reason to do so should always be made with a full understanding of the condition and consequences of the decision after discussion with a doctor.**

### What medications will not do

**Medications do not work when symptoms are a response to life circumstances.**

Medications will not fix your financial or relationship problems, or help you to stop drinking for good. They will not help you find purpose and meaning or cultivate meaningful relationships. They will not help you to feel less alone. They will not change past experiences or teach you to change your relationship to those. They will not give you coping skills. They will not make you love your job. They will not take away your anxiety in social situations.

The cause of your depression might be because things could better:

- You drink too much
- You eat and drink too many food-like substances and you don't eat and drink healthy alternatives
- You don't do enough physical activity
- You are overweight
- You don't handle stress well
- You are not sleeping well
- Your close relationships are fractious and you are distant from friends and family
- You hate your job (in fact your medication might help keep you in a job that you hate, preventing you from going out and finding a job that you want to do)

- Your finances have suffered because of your drinking
- You spend time online, watching TV, comparing yourself to others
- You are getting older
- You don't own a motorcycle or a dog
- Every day is the same

Medication won't solve any of that.

**Questions to ask a person with a diagnosis (e.g., ADHD, borderline personality disorder, depression, anxiety)**

1. What drugs (including medications, over-the counter products and supplements) were/are you taking?

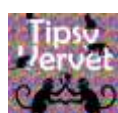
2. What are you watching and what are you listening to?

- What media and how much screen time?
- What type of screen time:
  - Gaming: What is the content of the game? Is it violent? Does it emphasise futility?
  - Social media: What type?
    - Comparing up (comparing yourself with people who look like they are better off than you), or comparing down (with people worse off than you)
    - Identification with up/down

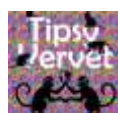
Reality TV	
Potential unhelpful influences	Potential helpful influences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unearned wealth and status</li> <li>• Gossip</li> <li>• Unfaithful friendships and relationships</li> <li>• Rudeness</li> <li>• Bickering</li> <li>• Faction forming among groups that claim to be friends</li> <li>• Dishonesty</li> <li>• Disloyalty and stabbing people in the back</li> <li>• Excluding and isolating people</li> <li>• Lack of boundaries and integrity</li> <li>• Lack of dignity</li> <li>• Lack of decency and kindness</li> <li>• Over-concern with looks and body image</li> <li>• Over-concern with materialism</li> <li>• Pretence of unattainable goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adventure</li> <li>• Courage</li> <li>• Hard work</li> <li>• Achievement</li> <li>• Earned status</li> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Benevolence</li> <li>• Charity</li> <li>• Support</li> <li>• Hope</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Entertainment</li> </ul>

3. What type of music do you listen to? Metal, screamo, rap, ballads, classical, techno? Are the lyrics uplifting, angry, divisive? How does the music you listen to alter your emotions? How do you feel while you are listening to this music (excited, motivated, sad, depressed, angry, feel like giving up, lonely, want to connect?) Do you feel like it makes you want to drink?

4. Who do you spend most of your time with? How do you feel while when you think about meeting these people? How do you feel when you are with them? How do you feel after you have left them?



5. Do you have structure and routine?
6. Do you have meaningful employment? Do you enjoy your job? If you do not enjoy your job, what would you prefer to do?
7. How well do you sleep?
8. Do you participate in regular physical activity, exercise and sport: what type, how much time, how often? Individual exercise, team sports? Presence of a coach?
9. What do you habitually eat and drink? Fresh fruit and vegetables, junk food, cool drinks?
10. Friends: Do you have close friends? How many? Does you interact with friends regularly? Are there close friends you trust and with whom you can safely share emotions, ambitions and desires/concerns?
11. How often do you have face to face contact with other people?
12. Do you have hobbies? Does you participate in group activities or games? Is there an instructor present?  
Do the hobbies leave you with a sense of accomplishment?
13. Activities that involve delayed gratification: What are they, how long till the outcome; do they involve learning/developing new skills?
14. Do you participate in activities where you make a positive contribution to the lives of other people?
15. Do you read: what, how often?
16. Do you take responsibility for your own life? Are there any structures in place that ensure you are accountable to somebody? Who is that? What are the consequences of transgressing the rules?
17. Do you have mentors?
18. Do you avoid doing things? If so, why? What do you do instead of doing the thing you are avoiding? What is the potential consequence of this avoidance?
19. Do you participate in therapy or activities to learn to pay attention and regulate your behaviour (impulse control)?
20. Do you pay attention to what is around you? For example,
  - small mindful moments – washing hands, listening, sight, sound, smell, feel, taste; mindful activities, e.g., eating and drinking, putting out clothes, washing up, setting the table, cleaning, washing the car, walking the dog);
  - mindful activities and hobbies (cooking, photography, art, creativity, rock climbing, bird watching, reading);
  - mindful movement (e.g. yoga, dance, chi gong, tai chi, martial arts, walking, etc);
  - breaking down tasks into small achievable periods of time and outcomes.



**If you are thinking about using medication, with the assistance of your doctor or therapist, consider the following questions:**

1. Is the medication absolutely necessary?
2. Are there nonpharmacological (i.e., therapies that do not involve medication) options that I can try first? For most psychiatric and psychological conditions, nonpharmacological therapy should always be considered be first.
3. How does the medication work?
4. What results can I expect from the medication and how long will that take?
5. What symptoms are likely to remain while I take the medication and how can I manage those?
6. How long am I likely to need the medication for?
7. When will we try to reduce the dose and/or discontinue the medication, and how will we go about doing that? How long will that take?
8. What can I expect when we try to reduce the dose and/or discontinue the medication?
9. How long will a reasonable trial of therapy be before we decide whether it is working or not and what is the plan after that if it is not working adequately?

### **Medication and drinking**

Medications and other treatments are unlikely work properly if you continue to drink alcohol. However, you should not have to wait for treatment if you are not yet abstinent. Discuss with your doctor what the effects of your drinking will be on your health when you start treatment.

If you feel like you have had a response to the medication, but you started it while you were drinking and then you stopped drinking, or you started it shortly after becoming abstinent, it is difficult to know whether your improvement is due to abstinence or the medication, or both. This is a conversation that you need to have with your doctor.

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