



# Talking to Individuals and Families About Long-Acting Injectables

Long-acting injectable antipsychotics (LAIs) are a pharmacologic strategy for treating individuals who have schizophrenia. Rather than the daily pill-taking required with oral antipsychotics, LAIs are administered by injection at two- to four-week intervals.

## Why Might Someone Need LAIs?

Individuals who have schizophrenia may struggle to adhere to their treatment plans, particularly with the consistent use of antipsychotic medications that are prescribed for them. LAIs are an option that can help stabilize symptoms with reliable dosing and steady levels. This can lead to fewer hospitalizations and improved overall treatment compliance.<sup>1-3</sup>

LAIs are a highly effective treatment option. Yet in spite of their efficacy, they are not widely used.<sup>4</sup> As a clinician, it is important to have a good understanding of the barriers to LAI use. This can enable conversations that effectively engage individuals and their families in their treatment plans.

## Potential Barriers to Use of LAIs

There are several factors that deter the broader use of LAIs, including stigma and lack of understanding of this treatment option. You can begin to ease these barriers if you fully inform individuals how LAIs work and discuss their thoughts and concerns on medication preferences. Common concerns that you may need to address during the discussion include fear of needles or injection pain, a lack of control over their medication, and cost.<sup>5</sup> These are manageable concerns and an open discussion may help reduce anxiety and stigma.

Other barriers come from clinicians themselves. Some may have limited experience with LAIs. Some may have a misconception that LAIs are only useful when there are issues with medication adherence. They may also have concerns over a potential increase in their workload or other service-related barriers.<sup>4,5</sup>

If you have such concerns or need more information on LAIs and their efficacy, take time to review current research and prescribing information. Additional resources are listed at the end of this factsheet.



## Possible Positive Outcomes

- ✓ LAIs ensure a consistent level of medication, which reduces the risk of relapse by effectively and consistently managing symptoms.<sup>5,6</sup>
- ✓ All new-generation LAIs demonstrate a statistically and clinically significant decrease of relapse rates over placebo.<sup>6</sup>
- ✓ Injection versus oral administration may allow for a lower effective dose. More of the medication is directly available to the body after administration and remains at steadier levels.<sup>5</sup>
- ✓ Regular administration of LAIs gives individuals and their support systems regular opportunities to touch base with their mental health providers.<sup>5</sup>
- ✓ Low incidence of adverse injection site effects indicate that these formulations appear to be well tolerated.
- ✓ Recent research indicates that individuals who use LAIs had significantly reduced rates of suicide attempts and death by suicide compared to those who exclusively use oral medication over the same period.<sup>5,7</sup>
- ✓ Patients who have schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder are less likely to have an encounter with the justice system compared with similar time periods before initiation of LAI treatment.<sup>8</sup>
- ✓ Currently there is no evidence that a higher risk of Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome (NMS) exists with LAIs.



## Possible Side Effects

**There are some potential drawbacks to the use of LAIs.** As with other medications, it can take time to find an optimal dose and negative side effects can vary substantially among antipsychotic medications.<sup>4</sup> Encourage individuals to communicate how they feel as their treatment team works to fine tune their dosage.

Side effects may include:

- ✓ Injection site soreness<sup>9</sup>
- ✓ Sleepiness or dizziness
- ✓ Over-sedation (delirium sedation)
- ✓ Skin rash
- ✓ Increased heart rate
- ✓ Blurred vision
- ✓ Muscle shakiness or stiffness, including other extrapyramidal symptoms (EPS)
- ✓ Weight gain and increased risk of Type II Diabetes or high cholesterol

### Discussing Long-Acting Injectables With Your Patients and Their Families

**When you center the discussion on the needs and concerns of the individual first, it can go a long way towards improving treatment outcomes, particularly with LAIs.**<sup>4</sup> You also want to include information about the potential positive outcomes and side effects that may occur.

Here are some suggestions to guide the discussion:

- ✓ Explain how LAIs work, including how they can effectively improve symptoms.

- ✓ Discuss the ability to receive a periodic injection rather than taking a daily oral medication. It is a persuasive point on convenience that also addresses any concerns with remembering to take medication as prescribed.
- ✓ Discuss how LAIs may help prevent relapses and hospitalizations, reduce mortality,<sup>10,11</sup> and be an important part of improving overall treatment outcomes.<sup>4,7</sup>
- ✓ Assure your patient that their treatment team works with them to develop a plan for dose and frequency, address side effects, and remain open to potentially changing medications if needed.
- ✓ Emphasize to your patient that they continue to have an active role in their treatment planning.

LAIs can be more expensive than traditional oral medications. Yet studies show that the higher pharmacy costs are easily offset by lower overall medical costs due to fewer hospitalizations and associated inpatient expenses.<sup>7</sup> This is an important point to address if medication cost is a treatment barrier.

## Additional Resources

[SMI Advisor Long Acting Injectable Center of Excellence DBHIDS LAI Summary](#)  
[NAMI: Long-Acting Injectables](#)

## References

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