

## Information for Family and Friends

People coming off prescribed psychotropic medication need the support of their family and friends but we understand that sometimes to do that you yourself will need support. The initial concern you may have will probably be to make sure your family member or friend coming off these medications is getting the support they need. You may not see yourself as someone with your own needs. But supporting a family member or friend coming off these types of medication can be demanding, stressful, upsetting and frustrating. You will need to help them get through the withdrawal and recovery period. There may be some difficult times during this process. It can be an emotional time. Information about types of medication and withdrawal from medication is available for you on this website which you can download.

This information will help you gain a better understanding of what you and your family member or friend may be facing. You can also contact us via e-mail or ring our telephone helpline on 0117 9628874. We are open Monday – Thursday 10am – 4pm. We sometimes experience a high volume of calls. If you are unable to get through please keep trying. Regretfully we are not able to return calls.

With our telephone helpline you will receive support from one of our counsellors who all have a vast amount of experience in this field. We can help with issues that arise, ways of coping, providing reassurance and help you to understand the types of medication their effects and the withdrawal process. All communication with us is kept confidential.

- Deciding to come off benzodiazepines, Z drugs and/or antidepressants is the first step for the person taking these medications. The more information you have on withdrawal the better equipped you will be to understand and support your family member or friend. Withdrawal from these medications can be bizarre and is not linear (i.e. it is not like a broken arm where you gradually get better with no setbacks) there will be times when your family member or friend is feeling better then a new withdrawal symptom can present out of the blue which can be incapacitating, this may then lift for a while for there yet to be another setback. This can be very difficult to understand even to the person experiencing withdrawal and you may find it difficult to relate to the experience. Withdrawal from these types of medication is understated and many people find it difficult to accept that taking a legally prescribed drug could result in such adverse reactions.

The most important thing to remember whilst supporting your family member or friend is to look after yourself and remind yourself and your family member or friend that although withdrawal lasts a long time and the symptoms seem persistent, withdrawal will not last forever.

## **What you can do to support your family member or friend**

- The more knowledgeable you are about benzodiazepines, Z drugs and/or antidepressants and withdrawal, the better prepared you will be to cope with it.

See

Minor Tranquillizers & Sleeping Tablets

Withdrawing from Benzodiazepines

Antidepressants TCAs, MAOIs, SSRIs & SNRIs

Withdrawing from Antidepressants

FAQ.

- Try not to be judgmental regarding the symptoms and experience your family member or friend is going through. Many doctors are not fully aware of the repercussions of coming off these types of medications.

### **Do**

Get in touch with your Doctor if there are severe withdrawal symptoms which cause concern regarding the safety for the person you are caring for (e.g. suicidal ideation).

Get in touch with your Doctor if there are any new or unexplained withdrawal symptoms to rule out any possible underlying conditions.

Give practical support e.g. helping around the home, doing the shopping, looking after the children. The person you are caring for may be quite lethargic and may not have as much energy as they did.

Make time to talk, communication is important. At other times space may be needed, or a reassuring hand (non-verbal communication is just as important).

Maintain a healthy diet and exercise. Carry on with your hobbies, make sure you have time to rest and relax. It may be that you need additional help at times from another family member or friend so that you can take regular breaks.

Make sure you have an emotional outlet, another family member or friend you can talk to about your feelings.

Most importantly keep encouraging and reassuring the person you are caring for.

**Don't**

Advise speeding up or slowing down the reduction programme.

Suggest reinstating the medication after the person is off their medication.

Make suggestions that they see a psychiatrist if they don't have a history of mental illness.

Take things personally - the person you are caring for may at times become agitated, angry or overly-sensitive. Mood swings, fear, paranoia and other psychological symptoms are common in withdrawal.

*If you require any further information or support please ring our helpline or send us an e-mail.*