

# Antipsychotics for the Management of Agitation in Adults with Personality Disorders or Cognitive Impairment: A Review

## Context

Personality disorder and cognitive impairment (i.e., impaired mental function) are two types of psychiatric disorders. The most common personality disorder among psychiatric in-patients is borderline personality disorder, which has an estimated prevalence of between 1.5% and 4% of the general population. Borderline personality disorder is associated with emotional dysregulation, impulsive aggression, and suicidal tendencies.

## Technology

Antipsychotic drugs are used to treat a variety of psychiatric disorders. They are commonly divided into two categories: first-generation antipsychotic drugs, or “typical antipsychotics,” and second-generation antipsychotic drugs, or “atypical antipsychotics.” First-generation antipsychotic drugs include haloperidol and thiothixene. Second-generation antipsychotic drugs include aripiprazole, clozapine, olanzapine, quetiapine, and ziprasidone.

## Issue

Although it is common practice among psychiatrists to prescribe antipsychotic drugs to treat borderline personality disorder, these medications have not received marketing approval for this purpose. A review of the clinical effectiveness of antipsychotics for reducing agitation in adults with personality disorders or cognitive impairment, as well as of evidence-based guidelines on their use for the management of agitation in these patients, will help inform decisions about the use of antipsychotics for the management of these disorders.

## Methods

A limited literature search was conducted of key resources, and titles and abstracts of the retrieved publications were reviewed. Full-text publications were evaluated for final article selection according to predetermined selection criteria (population, intervention, comparator, outcomes, and study designs).

## Key Messages

- Antipsychotic drugs may improve aggression, anger, or impulsivity in patients with borderline personality disorder (based on studies that were small in size and of short duration).
- One guideline recommends that antipsychotic drugs not be used for the medium or long-term management of borderline personality disorder.
- Another guideline suggests that psychotropic drugs may improve affective symptoms and impulsivity in borderline personality disorder (but cautions that a strong evidence base is lacking to support this suggestion).
- No evidence or guidelines on the management of agitation in patients with cognitive impairment were found.

## Results

The literature search identified 369 citations, with 1 additional article identified from other sources. Of these, 42 were deemed potentially relevant and 6 met the criteria for inclusion in this review — 4 systematic reviews and 2 evidence-based guidelines.

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