



## Using *Aripiprazole* in Children and Adolescents

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This information explains how *aripiprazole* can be used as part of a treatment plan for children and adolescents. You may wish to share this information with your family members to help them to understand your treatment options. Since every person's needs are different, it is important that you follow the advice provided to you by your own doctor, nurse and/or pharmacist and speak to them if you have any questions about this medication.



### Overview

*Aripiprazole* (*Abilify*<sup>®</sup>) belongs to a group of medications called “atypical antipsychotics.”

### What is *aripiprazole* used for?

*Aripiprazole* can be used to treat several conditions such as:

- Schizophrenia and other thought disorders
- Bipolar Disorder
- Symptoms associated with Autism
- Tic disorders like Tourette Syndrome
- Disruptive Behaviour Disorders (including aggression)

Your doctor may be using this medication for another reason. If you are unclear why this medication is being prescribed, please ask your doctor.



### How does *aripiprazole* work?

*Aripiprazole* affects the levels of certain chemicals in the brain called dopamine and serotonin. It is believed that some chemicals, like dopamine, are imbalanced in people who have disorders like Schizophrenia. The exact way that antipsychotics improve the symptoms of Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder is not fully known.

### How well does *aripiprazole* work in children and adolescents?

Current evidence supports the use of *aripiprazole* for the treatment of Bipolar Disorder and Schizophrenia in children and adolescents. *Aripiprazole* is approved for the treatment of these disorders in children and adolescents in the United States.

Less information is available regarding the use of *aripiprazole* in the treatment of symptoms associated with autism, Tourette and tic disorders and aggression. However, the available evidence is supportive.

### How should *aripiprazole* be taken?

*Aripiprazole* is usually taken once daily, and can be taken with or without food. If you find that taking this medication causes stomach discomfort, try taking it with food. This medication should be taken at the same time each day as directed by your doctor. Try to connect it with something you do each day (like eating breakfast, or brushing your teeth) so that you don't forget.

Usually, your doctor will start with a low dose of *aripiprazole* that is best suited to your age and size. This dose will then be gradually increased over a few weeks based on how you respond to it. You and your doctor can then discuss the best dosage to stay on based on how this medication is tolerated and how well it helps decrease your symptoms.

## When will aripiprazole start working?

Some improvements may be seen in as little as 1 – 2 weeks. However, it can sometimes take up to 6 weeks to see the full benefits of the medication. When aripiprazole is working well, you may notice that your thoughts are clearer and more organized. Agitation may be decreased and hallucinations (for example, hearing voices or seeing things no one else sees) may stop completely or be much less. Your mood may be more settled and you may see a reduction of intense fears and worries. It is important that you continue taking aripiprazole regularly, even if you are feeling well, as it can prevent symptoms from re-occurring.

Medications like aripiprazole do not work for everyone. If you are not feeling better within 6 weeks, your doctor may recommend you take a different medication.

## How long do I have to take aripiprazole?



This depends on the symptoms you have, how frequent they occur, and how long you have had them. Most people will need to take aripiprazole for several months. This allows time for your symptoms to stabilize and for you to regain your functioning. Your doctor will discuss the benefits and risks of taking this medication with you. At this time, you can also discuss how long you might need to take this medication.

**Do not stop taking this medication without discussing it with your doctor.**  
**If you stop taking aripiprazole suddenly, it is possible that your symptoms will return.**

## Is aripiprazole addictive?

No, aripiprazole is not addictive and you will not have “cravings” for this medication like you might with nicotine or street drugs. If you and your doctor decide it is best to stop, your doctor will explain how to safely come off this medication so that you don’t feel negative effects as your body adjusts to being without it.

## What are the side effects of aripiprazole and what should I do if I get them?

As with most medications, side effects can occur in those who take aripiprazole. Most side effects are mild and temporary. Sometimes the side effects occur before any of the beneficial effects. It is also possible to experience a side effect that you feel is serious or long-lasting. If this occurs, speak to your doctor about ways to manage the side effects at your next appointment. Here are some of the more common side effects of taking this medicine. In brackets are suggested ways to lessen these effects.

### Common side effects

Should any of these side effects be too troublesome for you, please discuss them with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.

- Agitation (*avoid caffeine, from colas, energy drinks, tea and coffee*)
- Blurred vision (*this effect often becomes less noticeable over time*)
- Constipation (*increase exercise, fluids, fruits, and fiber*)
- Dizziness or feeling lightheaded (*try getting up slowly from a sitting or lying down position*)
- Feeling tired, drowsiness, or difficulty falling asleep (*speak with your doctor if these effects persist*)
- Headache (*try using a pain reliever like acetaminophen (Tylenol®)*)
- Nausea (*try taking the medication with food*)
- Weight gain (*monitor your food intake, increase your exercise*)



### Uncommon side effects (e.g. those that occur in less than 5% of patients)

Contact your doctor **IMMEDIATELY** if you have any of these side effects:

- Difficulty moving, shaking, or stiffness
- Fever

- Feelings of restlessness
- Frequent urination accompanied by excessive thirst
- Fainting
- Rash
- Seizure
- Thoughts of self-harm or feeling worse



**Tip:** Aripiprazole can make some individuals feel drowsy, dizzy or slowed down. If you experience these temporary side effects, it is important to avoid operating heavy machinery or driving a car.

## What precautions should my doctor and I be aware of when taking *aripiprazole*?

### Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you:

- Have any allergies, or have experienced a reaction to a medication
- Are taking, or plan to start taking any other medications (including non-prescription medications and herbal products). Some medications may interact with aripiprazole. Your doctor may need to change the doses of your medications or monitor you carefully for side effects if you are taking medications that interact with aripiprazole.
- Have a history of heart disease, diabetes, stroke, or low blood pressure.
- Are pregnant (or planning to become pregnant) or are breast-feeding.
- Are currently using alcohol or street drugs. These substances may interfere with how well aripiprazole works for you and/or make you feel drowsy.



**Tip:** When taking this medication, your body may have difficulty regulating your temperature. You need to drink lots of fluids and water to avoid becoming dehydrated. You should avoid doing lots of physical activities on hot days.

## What special instructions should I follow while using *aripiprazole*?

- Keep all appointments with your doctor and the laboratory. Your doctor may order certain lab tests (such as glucose levels, lipid levels or liver tests) to check how you are responding to aripiprazole.
- Do not allow anyone else to use your medication.

**Tip:** Use the Antipsychotic Monitoring Form for Children and Adolescents to help measure your progress on this medication.

## What should I do if I forget to take a dose of *aripiprazole*?

If you take aripiprazole regularly and you forget to take it, take the missed dose as soon as you remember. If it is almost time for your next dose (e.g. within 4 hours), skip the missed dose and return to your normal dosing schedule. Do not take a double dose.

## What storage conditions are needed for *aripiprazole*?



- Keep this medication in the original container, stored at room temperature away from moisture and heat (e.g. not in the bathroom).
- Protect from light.
- Keep this medication out of reach from children.