Serotonin Syndrome

A rare, but potentially severe complication of antidepressant treatment

Serotonin Syndrome is a rare, but potentially severe condition caused by an increase in serotonin, a chemical naturally found in all our bodies. This condition may be brought on by the use of medicines that increase levels of serotonin in the brain, which include several types of antidepressants.

Of these, SSRI antidepressants are most commonly prescribed, and include: citalopram, escitalopram, fluoxetine, paroxetine and sertraline and the SNRI antidepressants, venlafaxine and duloxetine.

Other substances that may contribute include: 5-hydroxytryptophan (5HTP), cocaine, lithium, ecstasy, amphetamines, LSD, St John’s Wort and opioid pain killers, e.g. codeine and tramadol.

Symptoms vary in type and severity and usually occur within hours of taking the medicine.

- Diarrhoea
- Restlessness
- Profuse sweating
- Tremor (including fine shaking of the hands)
- Shivering
- Involuntary muscle twitches or jerking
- Mental confusion and mental state changes
- Raised blood pressure and faster pulse (heart rate)
- Increased body temperature
- Seizures or convulsions (fits)

The milder symptoms at the top of the list, including diarrhoea and restlessness, may go unnoticed but if seen should be reported to me or your child’s GP if they persist as a further increase in dose may lead to more severe symptoms. If your child develops any of the more severe symptoms, including involuntary muscle twitching, mental confusion, increased body temperature or seizures, or several of the milder symptoms all at the same time, then your child needs to be taken immediately to the nearest Hospital Accident and Emergency Department for an urgent assessment.

If you require this document in an alternative format, i.e. easy read, large text, audio, Braille or a community language please contact the pharmacy team on 01243 623349 (Text Relay calls welcome).
Take this sheet with you, or if you forget, make sure you tell the doctors there what medication your child is on. If confirmed as serotonin syndrome the antidepressant (and any other medication that might be contributing to the problem) will be stopped and supportive care to control symptoms used. The use of another medicine to reverse the effects may also be needed.

This is a rare condition and symptoms are generally mild. It is usually due to more than one serotonergic medicine or illicit substance being taken together.

This is extremely unlikely to affect your child but it is important that you are aware of it. As you may have read, many of my colleagues around the country and internationally, have found antidepressants a very helpful additional treatment for your child's difficulties.

If you are concerned over the next few days or weeks about your child's reaction to this medicine, do contact me, or your GP, to discuss it.

**My contact details are:**

Other side effects are detailed in the accompanying patient information leaflet.

More detailed information about Serotonin Syndrome is available on the following website:

[http://www.patient.co.uk/showdoc/40024932/](http://www.patient.co.uk/showdoc/40024932/)

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