

Serotonin Syndrome: What You Need to Know

What is Serotonin Syndrome?

Serotonin syndrome is an uncommon but serious condition caused by an excess of serotonin, a chemical your body uses to send messages between nerve cells. It can occur when you take medications that increase serotonin levels in your body.

Common Causes

- Medications: Antidepressants (SSRIs, SNRIs), certain pain medications, migraine medications, nausea medications, and some illicit drugs.
- Drug Interactions: Combining medications that increase serotonin levels, such as antidepressants with migraine medications or multiple antidepressants.
- High doses: Taking too much of a medication that affects serotonin.

Symptoms to Watch For

Symptoms can range from mild to severe and typically occur within hours of taking a new medication or increasing the dose of a current one.

Mild Symptoms:

- Agitation or restlessness
- Confusion
- Rapid heart rate
- High blood pressure
- Dilated pupils
- Muscle twitching or rigidity
- Shivering
- Heavy sweating

Severe Symptoms:

- High fever
- Seizures

- Irregular heartbeat
- Unconsciousness

When to Seek Medical Help

Serotonin syndrome can be life-threatening. Seek immediate medical attention if you experience severe symptoms such as high fever, seizures, irregular heartbeat, or loss of consciousness.

Prevention Tips

- **Medication Review:** Always inform your healthcare provider about all the medications and over the counter supplements you are taking.
- **Follow Prescriptions:** Take medications exactly as prescribed. Do not adjust doses without consulting your provider.
- **Be Aware of Interactions:** Be cautious when starting or stopping medications that affect serotonin levels.

What to Do If You Suspect Serotonin Syndrome

1. **Stop Taking Medication:** If you suspect serotonin syndrome, stop taking the medication immediately.
2. **Seek Medical Help:** Contact your healthcare provider or go to the emergency room right away.
3. **Inform Your Provider:** Let your healthcare provider know about all the medications you have taken.

Treatment

Treatment for serotonin syndrome typically involves stopping the medication causing the problem and supportive care in a hospital setting. In severe cases, medications may be given to block serotonin production.

Recovery

With prompt treatment, most people recover fully within 24 to 72 hours. However, it's important to follow up with your healthcare provider to discuss your medications and any necessary adjustments.

If you have any questions or concerns about your medications or serotonin syndrome, please do not hesitate to contact your healthcare provider.