

DRUG REGULATORY WARNINGS



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There has been an average of 30 government and drug company warnings every year recently. Below is a listing of warnings starting in 2005, categorized by type of psychotropic drug.

1. Warnings Concerning Psychostimulants

In 2005, the FDA ordered labeling changes for ADHD stimulants to warn that they can cause “visual hallucinations, suicidal ideation, psychotic behavior, as well as aggression or violent behavior.”

May 2006: Health Canada issued public advisory cautions that stimulants may increase heart rate and blood pressure and that this can result in “cardiac arrests, strokes or sudden deaths.”

August 2006: The FDA ordered a “boxed warning” for Dexedrine alerting that it could cause sudden death in children with heart problems.

January 2009: The European Medicines Agency Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) said information packaging for methylphenidate-containing medicines includes a statement that they can worsen “depression, suicidal thoughts, hostility, psychosis and mania.”

February 2009: The Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration placed a boxed warning on methylphenidate about drug dependence.

June 2009: The FDA stated there might be an association between the use of stimulant medications and sudden death in healthy children.

April 2010: The FDA added to Ritalin’s drug package insert, warnings of additional side effects affecting the brain and the blood vessels that supply it, such as brain hemorrhage.

2. Warnings Concerning Antidepressants

March 2004: The FDA warned that SSRIs could cause “anxiety, agitation, panic attacks, insomnia, irritability, hostility, impulsivity, akathisia (severe restlessness), hypomania [abnormal excitement] and mania [psychosis characterized by exalted feelings, delusions of grandeur].”

October 2004: The FDA ordered pharmaceutical companies to add a “black box” warning that antidepressants could cause suicidal thoughts and actions in those less than 18 years of age. This was later extended to age 24. Drug regulatory agencies in Australia, New Zealand and Japan have issued similar warnings.

August 2005: The European Medicines Agency Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use issued its strongest warning against child SSRI antidepressant use, stating that the drugs caused suicide

attempts and thoughts, aggression, hostility, oppositional behavior and anger.

January 2009: The FDA issued a letter requiring the manufacturers of Paxil to update its drug safety label to include information on Serotonin Syndrome or neuroleptic malignant syndrome-like reactions associated with SSRIs and SNRIs. These are potentially fatal, which manifest in high fever, muscle rigidity, loss of muscle control, racing pulse, change in blood pressure and more.

May 2010: UK's Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency published a report warning of antidepressants causing fractures. Studies have shown that in patients mainly 50 years or older, there is an increase risk of bone fractures in those taking antidepressants.

3. Warnings Concerning Anti-Anxiety Drugs

October 1991: The British Government banned the benzodiazepine Halcion because of its potentially dangerous side effects including memory loss and depression.

March 2005: The UK Parliament's Health Committee released findings of its inquiry into benzodiazepines stating that side effects "include excessive sedation, decreased attention, amnesia and sometimes intractable dependence. Abrupt cessation can lead to severe withdrawal symptoms, including convulsions in some patients."

February 2008: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration added a warning to Halcion that it could cause "Sleep-driving' and other complex behavior such as a tolerance/withdrawal phenomenon."

February 2008: The Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration imposed a boxed warning in the product information documents for medicines containing zolpidem [sedative-hypnotic], following reports of bizarre and sometimes dangerous sleep-related behaviors such as sleepwalking and sleep-driving.

May 2008: The FDA added a warning to Ambien that abnormal thinking and behavioral changes such as sleep-driving can occur, as well as other adverse reactions, including fatigue, nausea, vomiting, upper respiratory infections and more.

Withdrawal Warning: If you abruptly stop taking benzodiazepines, you may experience severe withdrawal symptoms such as increased anxiety, insomnia, confusion, pounding heart, sweating and shaking.

4. Warnings Concerning Antipsychotic Drugs

August 2000: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) required black-boxed warnings (the severest form of warning) for the typical antipsychotic Mellaril regarding its potentially fatal cardiovascular effects.

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September 2003: The FDA requested the makers of six atypical antipsychotic drugs add a caution to their labeling language about the potential risk of diabetes and blood sugar abnormalities.

September 2003: A study published in *Pharmacotherapy* by former FDA staff member Elizabeth Koller, M.D., and colleagues identified 289 cases of diabetes in patients given Zyprexa. Koller also conducted a review of the FDA's adverse-event reports for cases of pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas) in patients taking clozapine (Clozaril), olanzapine (Zyprexa), or risperidone (Risperdal). One hundred patients developed ketosis (a serious complication of diabetes) and 22 developed life-threatening pancreatitis. There were 23 deaths, including a 15-year-old who died of necrotizing pancreatitis (pancreas breaks down and dies).

April 2005: The FDA warned antipsychotic drugs in elderly patients with dementia could increase their risk of death.

June 2007: The Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration warned of cardiac disorders associated with Clozapine. In 2008, Medsafe (New Zealand) issued a similar warning.

2008: The Zyprexa Safety Information includes a "black box" warning of increased risk of death in elderly patients with dementia, as well as high level of fats in the blood, weight gain, high blood sugar, strokes and "mini strokes" (in elderly people with dementia), neuroleptic malignant syndrome, tardive dyskinesia, low blood pressure, trouble with judgment, thinking and reflexes, trouble swallowing, body temperature problems...and "this is not a complete list...."

April 2009: The Irish Medicines Board warned that both typical and atypical antipsychotics could cause a risk of stroke and increased mortality in elderly patients treated for dementia.

December 2009: The FDA updated the warning label for Seroquel to include more information on hyperglycemia and the potential increase in blood pressure in children and adolescents, and added new sections for high blood cholesterol and weight gain.

5. Warnings Concerning Mood Stabilizers

August 2000: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) required a black box warning on Depakote and Depakene because of the potential development of potentially fatal cases of pancreatitis (inflammation or infection of the pancreas).

March 2008: FDA required packaging for Depakote to warn that hypothermia (dropped body core temperature) is a risk.

April 2009: The Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration warned that sodium valproate (Depakote) may cause fetal malformations.