

# Evaluating the physical health outcomes of young people taking antipsychotic medications for a 12 month period

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## **ABSTRACT**

### ***Introduction/Background***

The negative impact of mental illness on an individual's physical health is well documented. When this trajectory begins is less apparent, but the risk for physical co-morbidity in young people diagnosed with first episode psychosis requires examination.

### ***Aim/Purpose of the project***

To present research findings that evaluated the physical health outcomes of young West Australians enrolled in a first episode psychosis program.

### ***Objectives***

To evaluate the health outcomes of young people a) enrolled in an early psychosis program taking antipsychotic medications for 12 months; and, b) when compared to a similar group who have been taking medications for more than two years.

### ***Methods***

An exploratory "within subject" and "between group" design was used. All participants provided written consent. Participants were a subgroup of a larger study and consisted of a) young people enrolled in a first episode psychosis program receiving antipsychotic medication for 12 months; and, b) a matched comparison group taking antipsychotic medication for more than two years and diagnosed with a psychotic disorder. Data were collected using validated questionnaires at baseline and 12 months.

### ***Results/Outcome***

One hundred and four people were included in the research. The risk for physical health problems began in young people in the first 12 months of being treated for their psychosis. Those who were in the first 12 months of taking antipsychotic medications reported the greatest increases in weight and body mass index. They also reported the greatest negative impact of their illness on quality of life outcomes.

### ***Recommendations/Conclusion***

The risk for developing physical health co-morbidities later in life appears to begin very early in the person's illness trajectory and is associated with the commencement of treatment using antipsychotic medications. Clinicians need to incorporate education and effective screening and monitoring programs early in the treatment journey to ensure these risk are mitigated.

