

What is this medication used for?

Aripiprazole is a medication used for schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

One study has looked at using low doses of aripiprazole (LDA) for people with myalgic encephalomyelitis/ chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS). The doses were between 0.25 mg to 2 mg per day.

This medication can reduce fatigue, brain fog, and post-exertional malaise. It can also improve sleep. When the benefits outweigh the precautions, side effects, interactions and cost, people may use LDA off-label for ME/CFS.

Contraindications or precautions

Before you start this medication, tell your primary care provider or pharmacist if you:

- Are sensitive to or allergic to aripiprazole
- Have a history of seizures, diabetes, obesity, or familial hypercholesterolemia
- Have a family history of a heart condition

This is not a complete list. Ask your pharmacist for more information.

How do I take this medication?

Your CCDP doctor or pharmacist will work with you to make a plan. They will tell you how to take the medication.

If you are sensitive to medications, start at a **low dose** (0.25 to 0.5 mg every second day). **Slowly increase** the dose every 3 to 4 weeks. The maximum dose for ME/CFS is 2 mg daily. You can take LDA with or without food.

When will the medication start to work?

We do not know how long it takes for LDA to work in people with ME/CFS. In a small study, 74% of people with ME/CFS noticed improved symptoms and continued to take LDA for less than 1 month up to 17 months.

Possible Side Effects

- Headache
- Drowsiness
- Feeling irritable or agitated
- Trouble sleeping
- Restlessness
- Shaking, muscle spasm
- Muscle stiffness, pain or weakness
- Metabolic changes, including: increased cholesterol, increased blood sugar, insulin resistance, weight gain
- Unusual movements of fingers, toes, neck, lips or tongue

Your medical team will check your weight and do blood tests before and during your treatment. These tests check for side effects.

Minor side effects like headaches and drowsiness may improve over time and you may continue LDA if these side effects are manageable.

If you experience any severe effects like unusual movements, muscle stiffness or spasms, stop taking LDA. Call your primary care provider.

Call 911 if you have an allergic reaction (swollen lips or tongue, breathing problems, rash on most of the body). This is an emergency.

Interactions

Avoid:

- Other medications in the same family (e.g. haloperidol, loxapine, risperidone, olanzapine, etc.)
- Alcohol

Note: This is not a complete list. Some medications and supplements can change your medication levels. Talk with your pharmacist or primary care provider before you take any new medication or supplement.

How is the medication supplied?

Aripiprazole is available in a 2 mg tablet.

Low doses (less than 0.5 mg) must be made by a compounding pharmacy.

Compounded LDA comes in oral liquid or oral capsules.

What will it cost?

Costs vary. Ask your pharmacy about cost before you fill the prescription. You can move your prescription to the most convenient pharmacy for you.

Aripiprazole 2 mg tablets for ME/CFS are not covered under the provincial drug plan, BC Pharmacare. These tablets may be covered by some private insurers.

Compounded LDA is not covered under BC Pharmacare or most private insurers.

Note for CCDP Patients

Please contact the CCDP to schedule a pharmacist appointment if you have any questions about this medication, including questions about side effects, dose adjustments, and compounding.