

Metformin for the prevention of antipsychotic induced weight gain

NHS Devon

Commissioning policy

The routine commissioning of metformin is accepted in Devon for the prevention of antipsychotic induced weight gain.

The Formulary Interface Group should include this in locally defined treatment decisions

Rationale for the decision

People living with severe mental illness (SMI) face one of the greatest health equality gaps in England; their life expectancy is 15–20 years shorter than that for the general population (largely due to preventable physical illnesses). Adults living with SMI have an almost five times increased risk of dying prematurely compared to those living without SMI. Antipsychotics increase life expectancy; however, they commonly cause weight gain. Obesity and overweight are known to be associated with adverse health outcomes.

Concerns regarding antipsychotic induced weight gain (AIWG) may also lead some patients to avoid taking antipsychotic medication. Interventions to reduce AIWG may help improve adherence and overall treatment outcomes.

Metformin is not licensed for prevention of AIWG. There is however consistent evidence from meta-analyses of short term placebo controlled RCTs suggesting that metformin is associated with a small but statistically significant reduction in AIWG at 3-6 months. This is supported by limited, longer term observational data for up to 2 years.

Metformin has a very low annual cost per patient. Even if it only results in a relatively small attenuation of AIWG, it is considered likely to represent good value for money.

Guidance notes on exceptionality

Not applicable

Date of publication:	Version:
03.11.2025	Policy agreed by NHS Devon