

READINESS TO TAPER CHECKLIST



PURPOSE

This worksheet provides you with an interview process and readiness checklist to explore whether your client is ready to taper from psychotropic medications and what will optimize success.

BACKGROUND

In my clinical experience, people can absolutely reduce, taper, and even eliminate psychotropic medications successfully. But many clients—especially those who have been on medications for years—return to their medications when they experience discomfort or what they feel is a return of symptoms. Successful tapering requires education about the medications and discontinuation process, a robust self-care routine, support (I call this the “taper team”), and patience to tolerate going slowly. The most crucial element of successful tapering and maintenance is the pace of the taper. I recommend a pace that is much slower than what is often suggested by prescribers. Tapering is not only about brain chemistry; it is about attitude, support, and dispelling myths and negative beliefs.

INSTRUCTIONS

Explain to the client at the start that they will want to engage their prescriber in the taper plan. If the prescriber is not willing to assist, the client will want to find another prescriber. See the **Recruiting Your Taper Team** worksheet (p. 237) for guidance on having a productive conversation with a prescriber.

If their prescriber agrees, complete the following sections to assess whether your client is ready to begin the tapering process.

CLIENT INTERVIEW

Client name: _____ Date of birth: _____

Intake form attached? Yes No

How many different medications are you taking?

For how long have you been using each medication?

What do you think is the best order of priority for tapering? *(The final decision may require input from the prescriber.)*

What are your current stress levels? Do you anticipate any stressors during the tapering process?

What and who are your social supports? Are they in place to assist you in successfully carrying out the plan?

What pace of withdrawal do you anticipate? *(Review this answer periodically.)*

What outcome do you hope to achieve? *(This can range from a reduction of dose to the elimination of medications.)*

CLINICIAN REFLECTION

What do you identify as optimal and achievable for this client's tapering process?

List the medications the client is seeking to taper, and learn about their half-life and recommended tapering process. *(It can be helpful to the client's understanding if they also do this research.)*

Have you completed the following with the client?

- Assessed the medications' benefits (or lack thereof)
- Assessed the client's current side effects
- Assessed how have things changed over time since using the medications
- Confirmed that the client's self-care strategies are stable and consistent
- Educated the client about self-care and there being no "quick fix"
- Incorporated methods to address dissociation
- Explored the challenges (e.g., misinformation, triggers) and benefits of obtaining support from online or social media groups
- Conducted a discussion of withdrawal syndrome

CLINICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Often, people think that tapering simply involves stopping the medication and coping with the potential side effects. However, a successful taper must address not only the client's physical health, but also the long-held beliefs and fears of the client, the clinician, and others.

Clients can be hypervigilant, looking for any signs that their symptoms are returning. Some may have been using medications for years, even decades, and requiring medication is part of their identity; it takes time for them to forge a new self-concept without medication. Clients may also be influenced by prescribers, family members, or others around them who fear that the client will relapse or who believe that the client must always be on medications.

You may share some of these fears and have concerns about your client's safety. It is important to identify and address these beliefs as you work with the client to plan a safe, effective, and supportive tapering process.

Considering the information that you've gathered, identify any potential obstacles to your client's tapering goal and when they might appear during the process. Then, brainstorm possible actions that you could take with the client to overcome these obstacles.

POTENTIAL OBSTACLES	TIMELINE	ACTIONS

Once you've determined that the client is ready to begin the tapering process, ask them to complete the **Recruiting Your Taper Team** worksheet (p. 237), then work with them to develop a realistic plan using the **Taper Calendar** (p. 239).

RECRUITING YOUR TAPER TEAM



PURPOSE

This worksheet will help you identify your “taper team”—the people in your life who can support you during the process of tapering off medications.

BACKGROUND

Tapering off medications can be a stressful, taxing process. Before you begin, you must have a solid support system in place. Use your social circle to support your health and wellness. You will return the support someday, or you may have already “paid it forward.”

INSTRUCTIONS

Fill in the provided roster with the names of people who could make up your support system, and identify how they might be able to support you during the tapering process.

NAME	HOW CAN THEY HELP?

Be sure to have open conversations with your taper team members about how long the tapering process might take, what they should expect, and what you might need from them. You can use the following dialogue prompts to guide these conversations.

DIALOGUE WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

I am working with my therapist and prescriber to taper off some/all of my medications over the next ___ months/years. Having a “taper team”—people who will support me to achieve this goal—will be important to my success. I feel you would be an important member of my team, if you’re willing to help.

Specific Questions

- If I feel anxious/fearful/stressed, can I call you up once a day/week to discuss how the tapering process is going?
- If I'm having a hard day, could we meet somewhere or video call to talk face-to-face?
- Would you be able to accompany me to some of my appointments?
- Could we plan to...
 - Go for a walk together?
 - Cook a meal together?
 - Share tea or coffee?
 - Do a self-care activity together?
 - Commit to an exercise class/routine that we hold each other accountable for?

(Decide how often you will do this activity together—for example, go for a 30-minute walk once a week—so they know what to expect.)

Remember to express your gratitude for this person's support (if they agree to join your taper team) or for their consideration and honest evaluation of their availability (if they decline).

DIALOGUE WITH A PRESCRIBER

I have been on the medication(s) _____ for ___ months/years. As you may know, I have been experiencing side effects, such as _____.

I want to reduce/eliminate medications, and my therapist and I want to engage your support so that I can be successful doing so. I have researched how to do this, and my health has already been improving as a result of therapy and my self-care program. I'd like to review my taper plan with you and obtain your feedback.

Specific Questions

- Would you be available to talk to my therapist at some point so that we are all on the same page as far as my process?
- Is the taper plan I've described feasible in your opinion? Are there any changes you would recommend?
- Would you be willing to prescribe this alternative medication: _____?

Remember to thank them for their time and support. If they are not willing to help you taper off your medications, you may wish to find a different prescribing provider; you could ask the current one for a referral.

TAPER CALENDAR



PURPOSE

This worksheet will help you and your therapist plan your taper process.

BACKGROUND

Setting a schedule with the guidance of your therapist is crucial for tapering off medications effectively and safely. This does not mean the schedule is written in stone; it can change as needed, usually to slow down the process. Tapering is a marathon, not a sprint. There's no rush. If it takes a year, or multiple years, that's perfectly fine! You will be successful. When you feel impatient, repeat this mantra: *Take your time tapering.*

INSTRUCTIONS

With your therapist, complete the following chart to set your goals for tapering off medications (you can make as many copies as needed). Include the specific dosages for each week. As you enact your tapering plan, make notes of how you are feeling (emotionally, mentally, and physically). Bring this chart to your follow-up appointments to discuss with your therapist.

WEEK	DOSAGE OF MEDICATION(S)	NOTES (HOW ARE YOU FEELING?)