

NMS vs Serotonin Syndrome

DFM Reviews — PMHNP Board Review Quick Reference

Feature	Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome (NMS)	Serotonin Syndrome
Cause	Dopamine blockers (antipsychotics)	Serotonergic drugs (SSRIs, SNRIs, MAOIs)
Onset	Days to weeks	Hours (rapid)
Key Finding	“Lead pipe” rigidity	Clonus, hyperreflexia, myoclonus
Temp	Very high (>40°C/104°F)	Elevated (usually lower than NMS)
Mental Status	Altered (confusion, catatonia)	Agitation, restlessness
Reflexes	Decreased / normal	Increased (hyperreflexia)
Labs	Elevated CPK, WBC, metabolic acidosis	Usually normal labs
Treatment	Stop antipsychotic + Dantrolene + Bromocriptine	Stop serotonergic drug + Cyproheptadine

Memory Trick

NMS = FALTER: Fever, Altered mental status, Lead-pipe rigidity, Tremor, Elevated CPK, Rigidity

Serotonin Syndrome = SHIVERS: Shivering, Hyperreflexia, Increased temp, Vital sign instability, Encephalopathy, Restlessness, Sweating