

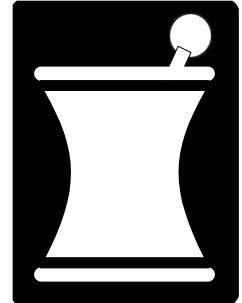
Which antidepressant is right for me?

Patient Information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

What is an antidepressant and when are they used?

Antidepressants are medicines used to help treat illnesses such as depression, anxiety or panic disorder. They can also be used in some cases of chronic pain, obsessive compulsive disorder, eating disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Antidepressants are one of the main treatments for depression. Talking therapies are often used either alone or in combination with antidepressant medication. In some cases, other medicines may be used with antidepressant medicines to treat depression.



How do antidepressant medications work?

In depression, there may be an imbalance with the chemical messengers (neurotransmitters) in the brain and they may be working in a different way to normal. This affects how you feel emotionally and physically.

This chemical imbalance can cause you to have problems with your sleep and may change your appetite. It may cause you to have no energy, have poor concentration, and greater sensitivity to pain.

All antidepressants work in different ways. Antidepressants work by balancing the levels of chemical messengers (neurotransmitters) in the brain. These chemical messengers are called serotonin, dopamine and noradrenaline. By restoring the chemical balance, antidepressants help to relieve depression.

What different antidepressants are available?

There are several kinds of antidepressants available.

Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) are usually first choice as they often work well, are safe and well tolerated. These include sertraline, citalopram, escitalopram, fluoxetine and paroxetine.

Venlafaxine works in a similar way to the SSRIs but does have other effects. Doctors sometimes use venlafaxine when the SSRIs do not help enough.

Less commonly used antidepressants include bupropion, mirtazapine, moclobemide, tranylcypromine and the tricyclic antidepressants (TCA). The tricyclic antidepressants include amitriptyline, nortriptyline, clomipramine and imipramine.

What about the side effects from antidepressants?

Different antidepressants will have different side effects. These are usually mild and do not last long. Different people can experience different side effects to the same medicine. Some people will experience no side effects.

Common side effects of antidepressants

Medicine	Sedation	Hypotension □	Weight gain	Anticholinergic effects □	Nausea & vomiting □	Sexual dysfunction
Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRIs)	-	-	*	*	**	***
Venlafaxine	-	-	*	-	***	***
Mirtazapine	***	*	***	*	*	-
Bupropion	-	-	-	-	*	-
Tricyclic Antidepressants	***	***	**	***	*	* or**
Moclobemide	-	-	*	-	**	*

Key:

*** = common

** = uncommon

* = rare

- = absent or very rare

1. Hypotension is when you have low blood pressure. This can include feeling light-headed or dizzy. It can make you feel like you are going to pass out when you stand up too quickly from lying or sitting down.

2. Anticholinergic effects include blurry vision, constipation, dry mouth, and difficulty urinating. Rarely, some people find that they can't think as clearly

3. Nausea and vomiting with antidepressants can occur when you start an antidepressant but this usually wears off pretty quickly.

If you have minor side effects when you start taking an antidepressant, try staying on the medicine for a few weeks. Sometimes people may feel a little worse before they start getting better and may give up too soon. Minor side effects often go away after your body gets used to the new medicine.

If the side effects do not go away or if they are worrying you, be sure to mention your problems to your doctor as they may have suggestions for how to reduce or manage your side effect.

Which is the best antidepressant?

All first line antidepressants are similar in terms of how well they work. There are some differences and your doctor will be able to explain these to you.

How might your doctor decide which antidepressant to use?

Your doctor will choose based on factors like:

- The medication's safety and side effect profile.
- Your specific symptoms or other illnesses that you have.
- Other medications you are taking
- The number of pills you need to take each day.
- Your previous responses to antidepressants.
- Whether a particular antidepressant has worked for a family member, can indicate how well it might work for you.
- Whether you are pregnant or breastfeeding
- Other health conditions you may have, for example: epilepsy, heart, liver or kidney disease.

Some people will respond better to one antidepressant medicine than another. You may need to try different ones before finding one that works best for you. Most people just take one antidepressant at a time but some people may need to use two antidepressants in combination. Finding the right antidepressant (or combination of antidepressants) can take some trial and error, so try not to get discouraged.

When deciding on the best medication for you, it is important to discuss with your healthcare provider the possible side effects of the antidepressant and how they are likely to impact your lifestyle.

How soon do antidepressants work?

Most antidepressants begin to help within two weeks of starting to take them. It usually takes between four and six weeks before you get the full effect. If you don't feel any better after two to four weeks, inform your doctor. Your doctor may increase your dose or change to another antidepressant.

Are antidepressants safe for me?

It is usually safe to take antidepressants regularly as prescribed by your doctor, though it does not suit everyone. Let your doctor know if you have any medical conditions you are concerned about. Not all antidepressants are recommended in children or adolescents. Please discuss this with your doctor.

Are antidepressants addictive?

No. Antidepressants are not habit-forming or addictive. They do not produce a “high” feeling, but slowly work to restore chemical balances in the brain. Some people have been taking antidepressants continually for over 30 years without problems.

When I feel better, can I stop taking my antidepressant?

No. Antidepressants are not addictive but your body can become used to them. If you stop taking them suddenly you may get some symptoms, which can make you feel ill for a few days.

There is no set time for how long you should take antidepressants. Your doctor may ask you to take your antidepressants for six months after your symptoms are gone. This can help stop your symptoms coming back. Your doctor will work out how much you should take and for how long.

You should talk to your doctor before stopping your medication and make a plan for how it is going to happen.

What about alcohol?

Initially you should not drink alcohol when taking an antidepressant. This is because both alcohol and antidepressants can make you drowsy. If the two are taken at the same time, you may become very drowsy and clumsy. This can lead to falls and accidents.

Drinking alcohol can also make depression worse. Once you are used to your antidepressant, you can sometimes drink alcohol in small amounts without any harm. Avoid alcohol in the first one to two months. After this, if you want a drink, try a glass of your normal drink to see how you feel. If this does not make you drowsy or uncoordinated, it is probably okay to drink small amounts.

It pays to be very careful because alcohol affects people in different ways, especially when they are taking medications. It is recognised that many road accidents occur because of mixing alcohol with medicines. This includes antidepressants. However, do not stop taking your antidepressant just because you fancy a drink on the weekend.

It may seem like alcohol or drugs lessen some symptoms of depression, but in the long run they generally worsen symptoms and make depression harder to treat.

Discuss any concerns you have with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

What about children and adolescents?

In children and adolescents, for mild to moderate anxiety, talking therapies including cognitive behaviour therapy and family therapies are the first line treatment. In more severe depression and anxiety, antidepressants can be very helpful as an additional treatment. Not all antidepressants used in adults are effective in children and adolescents. Your doctor will discuss with you which antidepressants would be most likely to be effective.

Depression and other serious mental illnesses are the most important causes of suicidal thoughts and actions. Treating depression reduces the risk of this. Antidepressant

medicines may rarely increase suicidal thoughts or actions in some children, teenagers and young adults when the medicine is first started. It is important to closely monitor for this possibility.

How can I watch for and try to prevent suicidal thoughts and actions in myself or a family member?

- Pay close attention to any changes, especially sudden changes, in mood, behaviours, thoughts, or feelings. This is very important when an antidepressant medicine is first started or when the dose is changed.
- Call the healthcare provider right away to report new or sudden changes in mood, behaviour, thoughts, or feelings.
- Keep all follow-up visits with the healthcare provider as scheduled. Call the healthcare provider between visits as needed, especially if you have concerns about symptoms.

Where can I find further information?

Leaflets like this can only describe some effects of the medication. You may also find other books or leaflets useful. If you have access to the internet, you may find a lot of information there as well. Be careful as internet-based information is not always accurate.

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