

Frequently Asked Questions about Antidepressants

How do antidepressants work and how long does it take?

- Antidepressants help to balance the chemicals (neurotransmitters) in the brain
- Neurotransmitters affect mood
- People start to feel better 2-4 weeks after starting an antidepressant.
- Many notice their sleep and appetite get better first while mood and energy take a bit longer to get better.
- If your depression is not getting better after a few weeks, your doctor may increase your dose, change medications or recommend counseling.

Will antidepressants make my depression go away?

- Antidepressants are shown to improve mood in people with moderate to severe depression.
- Antidepressants may be combined with psychotherapy/counseling to get the best result.
- People with mild depression may be able to manage depression with counseling instead of antidepressants. If counseling alone doesn't work, an antidepressant can be added later.

Can I take other medications with my antidepressant?

- Discuss all medications, supplements and herbs with your Dr. and pharmacist.
- Antidepressants are safe to take with many other medications, over the counter remedies and supplements. Check with your Dr. and pharmacist to be sure.
- Do not take St. John's Wort (an herbal remedy for mild depression) with your antidepressant. This can cause a drug reaction called Serotonin Syndrome.
- Taking antidepressants with antiinflammatory medicines like ibuprofen or naproxen increases the chance of gastrointestinal bleeding.

I'm feeling better. Can I stop taking my antidepressant?

- No. Do not change your dose or stop taking your medication unless your Dr. tells you to.
- Stopping too soon may let your depression come back.
- Some antidepressants must be stopped slowly. Stopping suddenly can cause unpleasant symptoms.

Will I have any side effects?

- Mild side effects are common and many go away after a few days or weeks.
- Reading the information that comes with your medication will tell you what side effects to expect.
- Common side effects are feeling jittery, sleepiness, dry mouth, nausea and difficulty achieving orgasm.
- If side effects are difficult or last longer than a week, contact your health care provider.
- If you have racing thoughts, new anxiety or worsening depression, contact your doctor right away.

How often should I see my doctor?

- You and your doctor should decide together how often he/she needs to see you.
- How often depends on your symptoms and what you are experiencing.
- Keep all of your appointments and call your doctor for concerns about side effects or worsening symptoms.

Can I get addicted?

- No. Antidepressants don't cause cravings or make it hard to control your use of them.
- Antidepressants can cause side effects if you stop taking them suddenly. Only change or adjust your dose if your health care team directs you to.
- Common side effects are headaches, nausea, dizziness, fatigue and return of depression.

Do antidepressants cause suicide?

- Depression (not antidepressants) is the #1 cause of suicidal thoughts and actions.
- The Food and Drug Administration requires a warning label on all antidepressants which say some people may have an increase in suicidal thoughts when they start an antidepressant.
- Long term treatment with antidepressants can help decrease thoughts of suicide.
- Contact your health care provider right away if you have new or frequent thoughts about suicide especially at the start of treatment.

What should I do if I forget to take a dose?

- Do not double up on your dose.
- Take your next dose at your regularly schedule time.
- Work hard to take your dose at the same time everyday.
- Antidepressants work best when you keep a constant level in your system.

Can I drink alcohol when I'm on an antidepressant?

- It's best not to drink alcohol while on an antidepressant.
- Alcohol can interfere with your medication and make your symptoms harder to treat.
- Alcohol may seem to improve your mood for a little while, but will make your depression symptoms worse in the long run.
- Alcohol can make you more depressed.

Can I take a natural remedy instead?

- Natural remedies aren't a replacement for antidepressants.
- Some people report supplements like St. John's Wort and SAMe work well.
- Some herbal and dietary supplements can cause dangerous interactions with other medicines.
- Ask your health care provider before taking any supplements or herbs.

How long should I take the antidepressant?

- Even though you may be feeling better, your Dr. may ask you to keep taking the medication for 6-9 months or longer to keep your depression from coming back.
- People who have had depression before usually need to stay on the medication longer to keep symptoms away