

# Antidepressants and Their Side Effects

Antidepressants are medications that help balance the chemicals in your brain that affect your mood. People taking antidepressants need to follow their doctors' directions. This medicine should be taken in the right dose for the right amount of time. It can take 3 or 4 weeks for the medicine to work. Some people take them for a short time. People with long-term or severe depression may need to take this type of medicine for a long time.

Once a person is taking antidepressants, it is important not to stop taking them without the help of a doctor. Sometimes people taking antidepressants feel better and stop taking the medication too soon. This means the depression may return. When it is time to stop the medication, the doctor will help the person slowly and safely decrease the dose. It's important to give the body time to adjust to the change. People don't get addicted, or "hooked," on the medications. But stopping them quickly can cause problems.

If a medicine does not work, it may help to try another one. A study funded by the National Institute of Mental Health found that if the first medication does not help, chances of getting better improved with a new one. Sometimes adding a second medicine helped.

Do not take a double dose if you forget your medication. Take your next dose at the regular time.

Antidepressants may cause mild side effects that usually do not last long. **Any unusual reactions or side effects should be reported to a doctor right away.**

## The most common side effects associated with newer antidepressants include:

- Headache, which usually goes away within a few days.
- Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach), which usually goes away within a few days.
- Sleeplessness or feeling tired. This may happen during the first few weeks, but then the feeling goes away. Sometimes the medication dose needs to be reduced or the time of day it is taken needs to be changed to help lessen these side effects.
- Agitation (feeling jittery).
- Sexual problems, which can affect both men and women. It may include a lower sex drive, and problems having and enjoying sex.

## Older antidepressants can cause other side effects, including:

- Dry mouth.
- Constipation.
- Bladder problems. It may be hard to empty the bladder, or the urine stream may not be as strong as usual. Older men with enlarged prostate conditions may be more affected.
- Sexual problems, which can affect both men and women. It may include a lower sex drive, and problems having and enjoying sex.
- Blurred vision, which usually goes away quickly.
- Feeling tired. Usually, antidepressants that make you drowsy are taken at bedtime.

## Helpful hints:

- If your medicine upsets your stomach, ask your doctor if you should take it with a meal or if the risk may be less with a brand rather than a generic form of a drug.
- If your depression medicine makes you sleepy during the day or keeps you awake at night, ask your doctor what time of day you should take it. By taking your medicine first thing in the morning or right before bed, you might lessen some of the unwanted effects.
- Don't take depression medicine with alcohol. Alcohol can affect how well the medicine works, cause you to sleep and possibly worsen depression.
- If you have dry mouth, chew gum or sip water throughout the day.
- Using over-the-counter medications for diarrhea or constipation may eliminate some symptoms.



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