

# Learning About Antidepressants



## What are antidepressants?

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Antidepressants are medicines that change the levels of some chemicals in the brain. They can help affect moods. There are different types. They work on brain chemicals in different ways. These medicines can help treat depression. They are also used for anxiety, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and chronic pain.

## What are some examples?

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There are many types of antidepressants. They include:

### **Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs).**

Some examples are:

- Citalopram.
- Fluoxetine.
- Sertraline.

### **Serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs).**

Some examples are:

- Duloxetine.
- Venlafaxine.

### **Atypical antidepressants.**

These include:

- Bupropion.
- Mirtazapine.
- Trazodone.

### **Tricyclic and tetracyclic antidepressants.**

These include:

- Amitriptyline.
- Nortriptyline.

### **Monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs).**

An example is selegiline.

## **What are the side effects?**

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Side effects may vary. They depend on the medicine you take. But common ones include:

- Nausea.
- Dry mouth.
- Loss of appetite.
- Diarrhea or constipation.
- Sexual problems. (These may include loss of desire or erection problems.)
- Headaches.
- Trouble falling asleep. Or you may wake up a lot at night.
- Weight gain.
- Feeling nervous or on edge.
- Feeling drowsy in the daytime.

Problems with sexual arousal and a lack of interest in sex are common side effects. If this happens to you, talk to your doctor. There are other medicines that may help with these problems.

Mild side effects may go away after you take the medicine for a few weeks. If the side effects bother you, talk with your doctor. You may need a different medicine. Or the doctor may suggest ways to manage your side effects.

## **How do you take antidepressants safely?**

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If your doctor has prescribed antidepressants, try these tips. They can help you get the most from your medicine.

- Share your health history with your doctor.  
Tell your doctor about your other medicines and health conditions. These things can affect which antidepressant your doctor prescribes for you. Tell your doctor if you or anyone in your family has had bipolar disorder or used antidepressants before.
- Take your medicine as prescribed.

It works best and has fewer side effects when you take it exactly as your doctor prescribed. If you miss a dose and it's not too late in the day, you can still take it. Don't double up doses.

- Keep taking your medicine for a while.  
Take it for at least 6 months after you feel better. This can help keep you from getting symptoms again.
- Be prepared to try different medicines and doses.  
You may start to feel better within 1 to 3 weeks after you start the medicine. If you have not improved at all in 3 weeks, your doctor may increase your dose. Or you may need to try a different medicine. Over time, your doctor may need to adjust your dose again to manage your symptoms better.
- Don't take any new medicines unless you talk to your doctor first.  
Even common medicines like aspirin and some vitamins and herbs can cause problems if you use them while you take antidepressants.
- Do not drink alcohol.  
It can make the side effects worse.
- Don't stop taking your medicine on your own.  
Quitting antidepressants too quickly can cause withdrawal symptoms. It can also cause depression to come back. If you are having a problem with your medicine or are ready to quit taking it, work with your doctor. They can help you to slowly reduce the dose over a span of a few weeks.
- **Call your doctor right away** for serious side effects.  
Watch for:
  - Warning signs of suicide. These include talking or writing about death, giving away belongings, and withdrawing from family and friends.
  - Manic behavior. This includes having very high energy, sleeping less than normal, being impulsive, or being grouchy or restless.
  - Serotonin syndrome. This can happen if you take too much antidepressant medicine or take more than one type of medicine that affects serotonin. Signs may include high body temperature, clumsiness, nausea, and feeling restless.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## Where can you learn more?

Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/patiented>

Enter **A230** in the search box to learn more about "**Learning About Antidepressants**".

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