



# Treatment of Depression with Antidepressant Medication

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**Depression** is an illness that affects the mind as well as the body. It is not a sign of personal weakness or a condition that can be willed or wished away. People with a depressive illness cannot merely “pull themselves together” and get better.




Antidepressant medications modify the balance of chemicals in the brain that often cause depression. There are several types of antidepressant medications used to treat depressive disorders and the most commonly used are the SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors). You may need to try several antidepressants before you find the one that works best for you. Sometimes the dosage must be increased to be effective.

Antidepressant drugs are **NOT habit-forming or addictive**. Antidepressants have to be carefully monitored to see if the correct dosage is being given. The doctor will check the dosage and its effectiveness regularly. *Anti-anxiety* drugs or sedatives are not antidepressants. They are sometimes prescribed along with antidepressants; however, they are not effective when taken alone for a depressive disorder. *Stimulants*, such as amphetamines, are not effective antidepressants, but they are used occasionally under close supervision in medically ill depressed patients. *Dosing and duration of the treatment can vary if these medications are used for treating pain and insomnia.*

## Medications Take Time to Work:

Although some improvements may be seen in the first few weeks, antidepressant medications must be taken regularly for 3 to 4 weeks (in some cases, as many as 8 weeks) before the full therapeutic effect occurs.

***Once the individual is feeling better, it is important to continue the medication for at least 6 to 12 months to prevent a recurrence of the depression.***

	1 - 3 mos To Get Better		6 - 12 mos To Stay Better	
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Some medications must be stopped gradually to give the body time to adjust. *Never stop taking an antidepressant without consulting the doctor for instructions on how to safely discontinue the medication.*

***Medications of any kind — prescribed, over-the counter, or herbal — should never be mixed without consulting a doctor. Alcohol, including wine, beer, hard liquor can reduce the effectiveness of antidepressants and can cause added sedative effects. Therefore, alcohol should be avoided.***



Be sure to call your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions regarding the medication that you are taking.

## Possible Side Effects:

Antidepressants may cause mild and, usually, temporary side effects (sometimes referred to as adverse effects) in some people. Typically these are annoying, but not serious.

*Headache*—this will usually go away.  
*Nausea*—this is also temporary, but even when it occurs, it is transient after each dose.

*Nervousness and insomnia* (trouble falling asleep or waking often during the night) — these may occur during the first few weeks; dosage reductions or time will usually resolve them.

*Agitation* (feeling jittery) — if this happens for the first time after the drug is taken and is more than transient, the doctor should be notified.

*Sexual problems* — the doctor should be consulted if the problem is persistent or worrisome.

Sleep disturbance and low libido are symptoms of depression and not necessarily side effects of antidepressant medications.

However, any unusual reactions or side effects or those that interfere with functioning should be reported to the doctor immediately.

*Patients with depression or other mental illnesses may think about suicide. Anyone taking antidepressants who has new or increased thoughts of suicide or other changes in mood or behavior, should contact their healthcare professional right away.*

**If you have additional questions or need more information about your medication, please contact your physician or other health care professional at (408) 554-9800.**