



FROM THE OFFICE OF DR.

# If you need an antidepressant...

If your doctor has prescribed an antidepressant, it is important that you keep taking it as instructed. Many patients quit taking their antidepressant medication and so may not get better. If you notice any side effects from your medication, don't just stop taking it! Let your doctor know, and see what can be done about it.

## It takes time to get better

When you first start taking your medication, some symptoms of depression may begin to improve after a few days. More significant improvement should occur after 4 to 6 weeks. If you are 65 or older, symptoms may take up to 12 weeks to improve.

Usually, you will start taking the medicine at a low dose. The dose will be gradually increased until you start to see an improvement, unless side effects emerge.

How long you need to take the medication

depends on a number of factors, including your age, the severity of your depression, and whether you have had depression in the past.

Generally, if this is your first episode of depression, you should stay on the medication for 1 year. If you have had two episodes of depression, your doctor may recommend that you continue the medication for 2 or more years. People who have had three or more episodes of depression generally need to take medication for life to prevent depression from recurring.

## What are the types of antidepressants?

### Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors

(SSRIs) include:

- Citalopram (Celexa)
- Escitalopram (Lexapro)
- Fluoxetine (Prozac)
- Fluvoxamine (Luvox)
- Paroxetine (Paxil)
- Sertraline (Zoloft)

SSRIs may have certain advantages over tricyclic antidepressants, including fewer side effects and improved tolerability. However, they are more expensive and can cause sexual dysfunction, nausea, diarrhea, and headache.

### Tricyclics include:

- Amitriptyline (Elavil)
- Amoxapine (Asendin)
- Clomipramine (Anafranil, for obsessive-compulsive disorder)
- Desipramine (Norpramin)
- Doxepin (Sinequan)
- Imipramine (Tofranil)
- Nortriptyline (Aventyl, Pamelor)
- Protriptyline (Vivactil)
- Trimipramine (Surmontil)

Tricyclics are less expensive and can be helpful for reducing pain, gaining weight, and improving sleep. However, they can cause dizziness, constipation, and urinary retention.

### Other antidepressants include:

- Bupropion (Wellbutrin)
- Mirtazepine (Remeron)
- Nefazodone (Serzone)
- Trazodone (Desyrel)
- Venlafaxine (Effexor)

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## Talk to your doctor about side effects

Your doctor will try to prescribe a medication with the least number of side effects for your health condition, and he or she will discuss its side effects with you.

You will be monitored closely so that your doctor can detect the development of harmful side effects and make the necessary changes. There are a variety of other antidepressant medicines available that may be prescribed, depending on your symptoms and individual needs. Sometimes, more than one medicine may be tried before the desired benefits are achieved.

Keep in mind that the benefits of the medicines generally outweigh the potential side effects. Some side effects decrease after you have taken the drug for a while. Be sure to discuss your concerns with your doctor before taking any medicine.

It is important to not drink alcoholic beverages while taking antidepressant medicines, since alcohol can seriously interfere with their beneficial effects.

## Do antidepressants increase the risk of suicide?

Experts are not sure if taking an antidepressant increases the risk of suicide, but we have to take

the possibility seriously. If you find yourself thinking about suicide, please tell your doctor right away. Your family and friends should be alert to this possibility as well.

## What are other treatments for depression?

Medications are just one part of treatment for depression, although they are a big part. Other treatments that your physician may prescribe may include:

- Stopping the intake of alcohol and sedatives
- Exercising regularly
- Eating a healthy diet (supplemental vitamin B complex)
- Switching current medications (such as anti-hypertensives, contraceptives, and steroids) to reduce side effects that may be causing depression
- Diagnosing and treating other conditions known to cause depression (such as hypothyroidism)
- Counseling
- Light therapy (exposure to white fluorescent light to reduce symptoms of seasonal affective disorder)
- Electroconvulsive therapy (for severe cases)
- Combinations of therapy.

## Where can I learn more?

- **National Alliance for the Mentally Ill**  
Colonial Place Three  
2107 Wilson Blvd., Suite 300  
Arlington, VA 22201-3042  
(703) 524-7600  
(888) 999-6264  
(800) 950-6264 (helpline)  
www.nami.org
- **National Mental Health Association**  
2001 N. Beauregard Street,  
12th Floor  
Alexandria, VA 22311  
(703) 684-7722  
(800) 969-6642 (Mental Health Resource Center)  
www.nmha.org
- **National suicide hotlines**  
(800) SUICIDE (784-2433)  
(800) 273-TALK (8255)