

---

## Information from your Patient Aligned Care Team

---

# Antidepressants

### What are antidepressants?

Antidepressants are medications designed to help the symptoms of clinical depression and other mood disorders.

### How do antidepressants work?

Antidepressants work by adjusting the levels of several types of chemicals in your brain called neurotransmitters. Possible side effects are the result of the same process.

### Are antidepressants addictive?

Antidepressants are not addictive.

### Why may antidepressants be good for me?

Scientific research has shown that people who take antidepressants in combination with behavioral changes experience less symptoms of depression and anxiety sooner than people who do not take antidepressants.

### Who can prescribe me antidepressants?

Your primary care provider may prescribe antidepressant medication for you.

### Why has my primary care provider tried me on one antidepressant when I heard from a friend that they started taking another?

Different antidepressants will affect different people in different ways. This is based on individual characteristics such as metabolism, as well as family genetic factors. Additionally, the specific antidepressant selected may be chosen based on other cooccurring medical conditions and/or specific side effect profiles. Not all antidepressants work for every individual, and you may need to try multiple medications before you find one that works best for you.

### What kind of symptoms will be improved if I start taking antidepressants?

Most people notice improvement in the following areas:

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| A) Sleep     | E) Restlessness, Agitation or feeling physically slowed down |
| B) Appetite  | F) Feeling worse in the morning                              |
| C) Energy    | G) Poor Concentration  |
| D) Sex Drive | H) Irritability  |

## What kind of symptoms may not be improved if I start taking antidepressants?

Many other symptoms like depressed mood & low self-esteem may respond only partially to medication. The medication you'll be taking is not a "happy pill"; it is unlikely to totally erase feelings of sadness or emptiness.

## How long will it take before I begin to feel better?

Length of treatment can vary widely from person to person. Typically, it may take 4-6 weeks for the major depressive symptoms to significantly decrease. It is important not to discontinue treatment at this point, since symptoms can return up to 80% of the time. In general, medication treatment goes at least 6 months beyond the point of symptom improvement. Then medication reduction under your provider's management can be started. If symptoms return during medication reduction, the dosage should be increased and continued for another 4-6 weeks before another trial on lower doses. Occasionally, a person may need to be on long-term medication management.

## How will I know that my medication is working?

The best signs that your medication is working include:

- A) Improved Sleep
- B) Less Day Time Fatigue
- C) Improved Emotional Control (fewer crying spells, better frustration tolerance)

## Will I experience any side effects?

Although antidepressants are typically well tolerated, there is the possibility that some individuals may experience side effects. Often these side effects go away within 7-10 days, but if still present after that time most can be managed by dosage adjustment or by switching to a different medication.

- **Dry Mouth**-drink plenty of water, chew sugarless gum, use sugarless candy
- **Constipation**-eat more fiber rich foods, take a stool softener
- **Drowsiness**-take frequent walks, take medication earlier in the evening, or if taking medication during the day ask your primary care manager if you can take it at night
- **Wakefulness**- Take medications early in the day
- **Blurred Vision**-remind yourself that this is a temporary difficulty, talk with provider if it continues
- **Headache**-usually temporary and can be managed by analgesics (aspirin, acetaminophen) if needed
- **Feeling Speeded Up**-tell yourself this will go away in 3-5 days, if not, call your provider
- **Sexual Problems**-talk with your provider a change in medications may help
- **Nausea or Appetite Loss**-take medication with food

## Can I drink alcohol while taking antidepressants?

Do not drink alcohol if you are taking antidepressant medication. Alcohol can decrease the effectiveness of mental health medications. If you desire to drink occasionally or socially (never more than 1 drink per day) discuss this with your provider.

The Center for Integrated Healthcare gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the US Air Force in the preparation of all or part of this informational brochure.