



Depression is a medical condition that affects the mind as well as the body. Antidepressant medications are believed to restore the proper balance of chemicals in the brain, so the mind and body can work together more effectively. The most common type of medication used to treat depression is called an SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor).

Antidepressants are not the same as anti-anxiety drugs or sedatives. Although they are sometimes prescribed together, anti-anxiety drugs and sedatives alone do not treat depression.

Medications take time to work

Antidepressants can take several weeks to start working. It is important to keep taking your medication until your doctor says to stop, whether you feel better or not. If you stop too soon, your depression may be more likely to return. Besides, some medications must be stopped gradually to give your body time to adjust.

In some cases of chronic depression, medication may become part of your everyday life.

Are antidepressants addictive?

No, they are not addictive. However, any medication taken for more than a few days has to be carefully monitored to make sure that you are getting the right dose. Your doctor will check the dosage and effectiveness regularly, especially in the first three months of treatment.

Can I take antidepressants with other medications?

Never mix medications of any kind without talking to your doctor or other medical professional. Be sure to tell your dentist and any other health care professional who prescribes a drug that you are taking antidepressants. Some medications that are very safe when taken alone can cause severe and dangerous side effects if mixed with others.

You should not use decongestants with certain antidepressants. Talk with your health care professional about this. Your doctor may prescribe sleeping pills for temporary use with antidepressants.

Alcohol, including wine, beer, and hard liquor, can reduce the effectiveness of antidepressants and increase their sedative effects. Therefore, you should not drink alcohol while taking antidepressants.

Be sure to contact your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions about any drugs or if you are having problems that you believe are related to your medications.

Are there side effects?

These medications, like any other, may cause mild and usually temporary side effects in some people. Report any unusual side effects, or those that interfere with functioning, to your doctor or other health care professional.

If your medicine is an SSRI, such as Prozac or Paxil, you may have some of these side effects:

- Headaches that usually go away on their own.
- Nausea, which usually doesn't last long. Taking your medication with food can reduce nausea.
- Nervousness and insomnia (not being able to sleep) may occur during the first few weeks. If these conditions don't go away, contact your doctor or other health care professional.
- You may feel anxious after you take the medication for the first time. If the anxiety bothers you, talk to your doctor.
- Sexual problems may occur. If this causes problems, contact your doctor or other medical professional. There may be a remedy.

Common myths and facts about antidepressant medications

Myth: Medications will cover real feelings of sadness or keep me from having appropriate feelings.

Fact: The medications will help prevent the extremes that make it difficult to deal with feelings effectively. They don't stop you from having feelings. Used appropriately, medication may allow you to work more effectively in psychotherapy.

Myth: Antidepressants are habit-forming.

Fact: Antidepressants are not habit-forming. You may need to take them for a long period of time, but long-term use is not harmful or addicting.

Myth: Antidepressants like Prozac cause people to become violent, crazy, or suicidal.

Fact: Antidepressants effectively treat depression for about 75 percent of the people who take them. Many people who are depressed have thoughts and feelings about suicide. It is possible that a very small percentage (one to three percent) of people who take antidepressants may have more thoughts or feelings about suicide, but the evidence is not clear. Your physician will monitor this closely and needs to know if you have any feelings of suicide at any time. There is no evidence that taking antidepressants makes people violent.

Myth: You can't be in a 12-step program if you are taking antidepressants.

Fact: Antidepressant medications are not addictive drugs, and they do not mask your true feelings. Taking a medication is a health decision you make along with your doctor. Nobody else has to know about your treatment.

Myth: Taking antidepressant medications means I have failed, or I am inadequate.

Fact: Using an antidepressant medication does not mean that you are a failure or inadequate in any way. Depression is an illness, not a personal weakness. You cannot just "snap out" of depression.

Myth: Antidepressants are a short-term solution to solving depression.

Fact: Antidepressants are usually given for at least six to nine months for a first episode of major depression. For some people, medication may be necessary on an ongoing basis.

Myth: Other people will know that you are on antidepressants.

Fact: A person on medication does not "look medicated." People can't tell by looking.

Myth: The side effects are worse than feeling better.

Fact: Most side effects are mild and they come and go. It may take up to six weeks for you to feel the full effect of the medication. However,

most people experience positive effects sooner. Many effects are subtle. You'll feel less overwhelmed, more able to cope, more directed, and less depressed. Remember, feeling better is not a signal to stop taking your antidepressant medications.

What should I do in an emergency?

If you have an emergency medical condition,* call 911 or go to the nearest hospital. When you have an emergency medical condition, we cover emergency care from Plan providers and non-Plan providers anywhere in the world.

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.org.

* An emergency medical condition is (1) a medical or psychiatric condition that manifests itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity (including severe pain) such that you could reasonably expect the absence of immediate medical attention to result in serious jeopardy to your health or body functions or organs; or (2) active labor when there isn't enough time for safe transfer to a Plan hospital (or designated hospital) before delivery, or if transfer poses a threat to your (or your unborn child's) health and safety.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse any brand names; any similar products may be used.