



Answers to your questions about antidepressants

Aetna Behavioral Health

How do antidepressants work?

They help restore the balance of important chemicals in the brain that affect your mood.

Are they addictive?

No. They are not addictive or habit-forming, and they do not give you a “high.”

Will I get better if I take them?

Between 50 and 80 percent of people who take antidepressants recover completely.¹ If you try one and do not feel better, there is an excellent chance a different one will work better and help you recover.

How long will the medication take to work?

Most people start to feel better after two to six weeks. In many cases, sleep and appetite improve first. It may take a little longer for your mood and energy to improve. If you do not improve after about six weeks, your doctor may want to change your dose or switch you to another antidepressant.

How long will I have to take the antidepressant?

Once you have recovered, you will probably stay on the medication for another four to nine months. This will help keep your depression from returning. If you have had depression before, you may have to stay on medication longer.

¹The MacArthur Initiative on Depression & Primary Care. Depression management toolkit. 2009; p. 25. Available at: www.depression-primarycare.org/images/pdf/macarthur_toolkit.pdf.

What should I do if I forget to take a dose of the medication?

Take your next dose at the regular time. Do not take a double dose unless you talk to your doctor and he or she says to.

Can I drink alcohol while on antidepressants?

Ask your doctor first. Alcohol can cause a bad reaction or make you feel worse.

Is it safe to take antidepressants with other medications?

In most cases, the answer is yes. However, you must tell your doctor exactly what else you take. This includes vitamins and over-the-counter drugs. Some can cause reactions. Your doctor or pharmacist can tell you which ones are safe to take.

Can I stop taking the medication once I start feeling better?

No. Do not stop taking the medication without first talking with your doctor. Stopping too soon could cause a bad reaction or could cause your depression to return.

Just like your body had to adjust to the medication when you started, your body has to adjust when you stop. So, you may end up taking the medication for four to nine months after all of your symptoms have gone away. Your doctor will lower your dose in stages.

Can an antidepressant help me with other problems?

Yes. Antidepressants can help with other conditions even if you do not have depression.

If you have any of the following, ask your doctor if antidepressants are right for you:

- Trouble sleeping
- Pain
- Low energy or excessive tiredness
- Anxiety or panic attacks

When these problems are related to your depression, you may see symptoms go away as the medication starts working on your depression.

Can an antidepressant help with stress?

Life stress (such as money worries, family problems, etc.) can cause or worsen depression. The depression can then make stress worse and affect your ability to cope. Treating depression can help you cope better and feel better.

Are there any dangerous side effects?

Side effects (or reactions) are usually mild. Different people react differently. So, ask your doctor what to expect and what to do if you have a problem. Your body will get used to the medication, so most minor side effects won't stay long. If you do have problems, your doctor may put you on a lower dose or switch you to another medicine. If used properly, there are no dangerous side effects.

You may start to feel better after taking an antidepressant for two to six weeks.

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