

About antidepressant medicines module - depression
Discussing the pros and cons

This module is scheduled to be accessed from:

- *Encounter 2 if not already prescribed antidepressants*
- *Encounters 4, 8, 9 and 10 if not already prescribed antidepressants **and** PHQ9 score is >10 or questionnaire declined.*

This module can also be used outside the above specified encounters as required where appropriate

16.0 *Discussing the pros and cons of antidepressant medicines*

Let's then, take a few minutes to talk about the benefits of taking antidepressants, including some of the possible problems and other issues that might be useful for you to know about.

Do you have *particular* questions or worries about antidepressants?

16.1 *Allow patient to respond and where relevant refer to the questions below. Use the options below to prompt the patient if they are unable to think of a specific concern:*

(NB: if the patient has discussed this with their GP before; use critical thinking to decide which sections would be most relevant.)

- a) [What if I don't have any treatment?](#)
- b) [Why should I take them?](#)
- c) [How long do they take to work?](#)
- d) [What about side effects?](#)
- e) [Are they addictive?](#)
- f) [What if they don't work?](#)
- g) [What happens when I start to feel better?](#)

a) What if I don't have any treatment?

Most people with depression will get better without treatment. However, this may take several months or even longer. The average length of an episode of depression is 6-8 months.

Meanwhile, living with depression can be difficult and distressing for people (and also for their family and friends). Relationships and employment may be seriously affected. There is also a danger that some people turn to alcohol or illegal drugs. Some people think of suicide.

Therefore, many people with depression opt for treatment.

b) Why should I take them?

Antidepressant medicines are commonly used to treat moderate or severe depression. They are very effective – most people who take antidepressants will find they help.

Although a medicine cannot alter your circumstances, symptoms such as low mood, poor sleep and poor concentration are often eased with an antidepressant. This may then allow you to function more normally, and increase your ability to deal with any problems or difficult circumstances.

c) How long do they take to work?

Antidepressants do not usually work straight away. It can take 2-4 weeks before the effect builds up fully. A common problem is that some people stop the medicine after a week or so as they feel it is not helping. You need to give it time.

Also, if it is helping, follow the course that the doctor recommends. A normal course of an antidepressant lasts for at least six months after symptoms have eased. Some people stop their antidepressant too early and the depression may then quickly return. You must not stop taking your medicine before talking to your GP first.

d) What about side effects?

Like all medicines, antidepressants can cause side effects. However modern antidepressants rarely have bad side effects. Most people who take them are not aware of any side effects at all, or only get mild side effects which usually settle down. The most common side effect is a slight feeling of nausea, which usually gets better after the first two or three weeks.

Unfortunately it is not possible to predict who will get side effects or how bad they will be.

Antidepressants affect people differently so don't be put off the medicine your doctor has prescribed simply because a friend or relation had a problem with it. There is a good chance that you will not have the same problem.

Side effects from antidepressants tend to be at their worst in the early stages of treatment. So, if you experience some mild or even moderate side effects, it may be worth persevering with your treatment to see if the side effects will settle. Your doctor or community pharmacist will be able to advise you on this.

If the first one does not suit you, then another may be found that will suit. It is a good idea to read the information leaflet with the medicine to tell you more about the side effects.

IT'S IMPORTANT THAT YOU SPEAK WITH YOUR DOCTOR BEFORE STOPPING ANY MEDICINE.

e) Are they addictive?

Antidepressants are not tranquillisers and are not thought to be addictive. However, up to a third of people who stop antidepressants can have withdrawal symptoms. These will be mild in most people, although occasionally, they can be quite severe (see [What happens when I start to feel better?](#)).

f) What if they don't work?

People with moderate or severe depression have a good chance of improving within a few weeks of starting an antidepressant. But, they do not work for everybody.

Tell your doctor if your symptoms do not start to improve after about 3-4 weeks. In this situation it is common to advise either an increase in dose (if the maximum dose is not yet reached) or a switch to another type of antidepressant. There are several different types of antidepressants and sometimes people get on better with one type rather than another.

IT'S IMPORTANT THAT YOU SPEAK WITH YOUR DOCTOR BEFORE STOPPING ANY MEDICINE.

g) What happens when I start to feel better?

At the end of a course of treatment it is usual to reduce the dose gradually over about four weeks before finally stopping. This is because some people develop withdrawal symptoms if an antidepressant is stopped abruptly. **These symptoms are usually mild and** will get better on their own, although they can be severe for some people.

It's a good idea to read the information leaflet with the medicine which will tell you more about the withdrawal symptoms to be aware of.

IT'S IMPORTANT THAT YOU SPEAK WITH YOUR DOCTOR BEFORE STOPPING ANY MEDICINE.

16.2 I hope that our discussion has helped to allay any concerns you may have had about antidepressant medicine. If you need to discuss this further, I think it will be a good idea to make an appointment to speak to your GP.

If the patient has other questions not covered here, suggest that they contact their GP or community pharmacist.