

Taking Antidepressant Medicines



You have come to the decision with your healthcare provider to try an antidepressant medicine for depression. To take antidepressant medicine safely, you will need some information.

Here are some things you need to know to help you safely take your pills:

- Ask your healthcare provider if it is safe for you to drink alcohol while on the medicines prescribed for you.
- If you have taken your medicine for a long time (months) and you feel it's not working anymore, contact your healthcare provider. You may need to add an additional medicine, change to a different medicine, or have your dosage increased.
- Don't suddenly stop taking your pills without consulting with your healthcare provider. Stopping suddenly can make you feel nauseated, dizzy, and unable to sleep. It can also give you a headache and nightmares. Depressive symptoms may return.
- Antidepressant pills may take some time to work. Depending on the medicine, it can take 2 to 8 weeks at the right level for your antidepressant to be effective. Most people first sleep better, then are less grouchy, and then are in a better mood. You will still have the same kinds of troubles or concerns you felt before starting the medicine, but those same troubles will not be as overwhelming. Remember, it may take some time for the medicines to work. You may feel the temptation to stop taking the medicines. Continue to take the medicines even if the symptoms of depression have not changed. Keep in close contact with your healthcare provider.
- Be careful when first taking your medicine and driving a car or operating dangerous machinery. Sometimes antidepressants can make you sleepy or dizzy. Contact your healthcare provider if side effects affect your usual activities. Your dosage or medicine may need to be changed, or the timing of taking your medicine may need to be changed.
- Antidepressant medicine may make your mouth dry. You can help this by taking frequent sips of water, sucking on hard candies, chewing on sugarless gum, and doing good routine oral care.
- Antidepressants can sometimes cause headaches. If you are not currently receiving chemotherapy, you can take a non-aspirin pain reliever for the headache. If the headaches continue or are not relieved by the pain reliever, or if you are undergoing chemotherapy, contact your healthcare provider to discuss what else you can do.
- Antidepressants can cause either diarrhea or constipation. If you have hard stools, increase the amount of fruits, vegetables, and fiber in your diet. If you have diarrhea, decrease the amount of fruits, vegetables, and fiber in your diet. If your changes in diet don't work, call your healthcare provider for suggestions before taking over-the-counter medicines.
- You may have nausea when you first start to take your antidepressant. Many times, the nausea will decrease in a few days. You may find that you need to adjust when and how you take your medicine, such as with food, after food, or before food. If the nausea continues, contact your healthcare provider.

Follow-up

Call your healthcare provider or get medical help right away if you have any of the following:

- Vomiting that won't stop
- Can't continue with usual activities
- Illness that makes you stop taking your medicine
- Extreme anxiety or changes in mood or behavior

- Thoughts of harming others, or intent to harm others
- Thoughts of suicide, or intent to hurt yourself
- Can't pass your urine

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