



Shots

SHOTS - HEALTH NEWS

Antidepressants harder to quit than heroin? Fact-checking RFK Jr.

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Antidepressants include a class of drugs known as SSRIs. Prozac, Paxil, and Lexapro are some of the brand names of the medicines that millions of people take safely.

Joe Raedle/Getty Images

During his Senate [confirmation hearing](#) to serve as Health and Human Services Secretary, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. suggested antidepressant drugs may be as addictive as heroin — a claim contradicted by research.

Kennedy's comment at Wednesday's hearing was one of a number of controversial claims he has made about [drugs and addiction](#).

Kennedy, 71, was a heroin user for more than a decade in his youth, which he speaks about frequently. He has been in recovery for 42 years he said in his second confirmation hearing on Thursday.

Though he lacks medical training, he has been a critic of antidepressant medications — a class of drugs called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs.



POLITICS

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"I know people, including members of my family, who've had a much worse time getting off of SSRIs than they have getting off of heroin," Kennedy said in the hearing.

Decades of research have shown SSRI use to be safe and effective, whereas heroin is highly addictive in almost all users.

"Antidepressants and heroin are in different universes when it comes to addiction risk," says Keith Humphreys, who studies addiction at Stanford University. "In my 35 years in the addiction field, I've met only two or three people who thought they were addicted to antidepressants versus thousands who were addicted to heroin and other opioids."

A study published in the medical journal *the Lancet* found significant withdrawal symptoms only affect about 1 in 35 people who use antidepressants. It is important to be in a doctor's care when going off SSRIs and to taper off gradually.

Kennedy has made [previous statements](#) about his approach to recovery from addiction, promoting the concept of "healing farms," where people struggling with addiction would live and work. Many who study substance-use disorders have expressed doubt about this approach as it focuses on the moral dimensions of recovery — rather than harnessing medical best practices.



NATIONAL

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In his testimony, Kennedy said the addiction treatment incorporating outdoor work should be available to people with substance-use disorders, but no one should be compelled to go "kicking and screaming."

Correction

Jan. 31, 2025

A caption in an earlier version of this story incorrectly said the medicine Wellbutrin is an SSRI. It is a different kind of antidepressant.



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