



Antidepressants are a group of medications that are commonly used to treat clinical depression or major depression. When used correctly they can be extremely effective by reducing the symptoms of depression, such as extreme sadness and feelings of hopelessness. Current research suggests that treatment for depression is even more effective if medication is coupled with counselling.

How do they work?

Antidepressants work by restoring the brain's ability to use "feel good" chemicals. These chemicals, such as serotonin, are believed to be the chemicals that enable us to feel happy and calm. It's estimated that 60-70% of people who have major depression are helped by initial antidepressant medication. Antidepressants also work well for less severe types of depression, including if the following symptoms are present; experiencing a recent loss of pleasure in surroundings, restless sleep, waking very early in the morning, loss or increase of appetite or feelings of hopelessness or guilt. Antidepressants are also seen to be effective in the treatment of anxiety – see the info. sheet on 'Medications used for anxiety 1A'.

antidepressant, body chemistry, age and body weight. Amounts are generally started low and raised gradually over time, until the desired effect is reached, whilst balancing side effects.

Some antidepressants are taken in the morning and some at night – it will be written on the packet when the medication should be taken. If it is not on the instructions the prescribing doctor can be asked.

If a dose is missed it is best to take it when remembered unless it is very near the time for the next dose. If it is near the time of the next dose, just take that dose – not a double dose.

It is usually recommended that people take antidepressants for at least 6-12 months but this varies depending on symptoms. Antidepressants should

or many. More side effects are listed in the packet of the antidepressant. Some side effects can be mistaken for some of the symptoms of depression so they should be discussed with the prescribing doctor. Alcohol and street drugs should be taken with caution when taking an antidepressant, as the effect is unpredictable (unknown).

Possible side effects of SSRI's: anxiety, nausea, headache, difficulty sleeping, sweating, dry mouth, loss of appetite, sexual dysfunction, drowsiness, dizziness and constipation.

Side effects of SSRI's generally pass after the body gets used to the antidepressant, usually within 1-2 weeks. Side effects should be discussed with the doctor, especially if they worry the person. SSRI's are not addictive and are difficult to overdose on.

Precautions: SSRI's can interact with other medications (including other antidepressants) and even herbal/natural medicines such as St John's wort. It is important to tell the doctor what other medications are being taken.

What to avoid/Precautions:

Alcohol and street drugs should be avoided or taken with caution when taking an antidepressant, as the effects are unpredictable (unknown). It is best to discuss with the prescribing doctor what other medications are being taken as they can have an effect on the antidepressant. Even "natural" medicines such as St. John's wort can interact with an antidepressant.

This information is to be used in conjunction with the information your doctor/health professional provides. It is not to be used in place of your health professional's advice. If you have concerns or are worried about side effects or dosage please contact your health professional.



What are the different types of antidepressants?

> Antidepressant medications fall into several categories, or classes, including serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI's), tricyclic antidepressants and monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOI's). SSRI's are the most commonly used. Each type of antidepressant works in a different way. If the antidepressant prescribed doesn't work, the doctor may try one from the same group or a different group. Some people may need to try several different antidepressants before they find the one that works best for them.

How soon will it take to work?

Antidepressants, on average, take from 3 to 8 weeks to work but some people see results in 2 weeks. The medication needs to be taken as prescribed, this is written on the packet. Some symptoms might get better quicker than others – for example sleep problems may improve before mood improves.

How much is needed and how is it taken?

The amount or dose of antidepressant that a person requires can vary depending on the type of

not be stopped abruptly as, although not addictive, some people experience withdrawal symptoms such as nausea, diarrhoea, restlessness, sleep problems and nightmares. Antidepressants are usually reduced slowly before being completely stopped.

Possible side effects

All medications have the potential to have side effects but they vary from person to person. The list below is some of the more common side effects that could be experienced. This means a person may have no side effects or one