

INFORMED CHOICES ABOUT

DEPRESSION

Medication treatments for depression

Key Points:

- The medicines used for depression are called antidepressants.
- It often takes 2 – 4 weeks on the right dose to see improvement in symptoms of depression. So it is important to continue with treatment, even if you do not notice much change at first.
- About 6 out of 10 people notice that they feel a lot less depressed on the first medicine they try.

Medication treatments for depression:

- Medication has been used for treatment of depression for many years and is generally safe and effective.
- This treatment works best when you work closely with your doctor on this treatment and other approaches such as lifestyle changes and counseling. Medication treatment may not be helpful in the long run unless you also deal with other factors that put you at risk for depression.
- The medicine is usually taken at least once a day. It is important to not miss any doses.
- Most people are treated by their family doctor.
- After assessing the problem and your general health, your doctor will start you on a low dose.
- The dose may be gradually increased over a period of several weeks, while you and your doctor watch for signs that the medicine is helping. The goal is to return to the way you were feeling before the depression started and to have the most improvement with the fewest side effects.

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Medication treatments for depression (continued):

- The dose needed to treat depression differs among people. There is no advantage to staying at a low dose if your depression does not improve. If you do not improve on a lower dose, many people improve when their doctor prescribes a higher dose or a different medicine.
- About 6 out of 10 people notice that they feel less depressed when they get to the right dose on the first medicine they try.
- If you do not improve, the solution may be a different medicine or adding a second medicine to make the first medicine work better.
- If it is hard to find a medicine that helps, your family doctor may suggest other treatment options or refer you to psychiatrist. The psychiatrist will review your situation and give advice about other medicines and other treatment options.
- It is important to stick with it until you find a treatment that helps.
- Medications should not be taken with alcohol, marijuana, or street drugs.

How long does it take the medicine to work?

- The dose may be increased several times over a period of weeks to reach the right dose.
- You may need to be at the right dose for at least two to three weeks to start to feel better. It takes longer to see how much your feelings improve with the medicine over time. Stick with the medicine to see how well it works.
- If you are not sure if the medicine is working, it is best to speak to your doctor.

Disclaimer: Information in this pamphlet is provided for educational purposes only. Always consult a qualified health care professional for your specific care.



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How long should you keep taking the medicine?

- It is usually recommended that you continue on the treatment for at least 12 months. This is 12 months after you feel quite well again, not 12 months after you first started the medicine.
- If there have been problems with depression several times in your life, or if the depression has been severe, the doctor may recommend that you stay on the medicine longer. Once you have been feeling better for 12 months, discuss with your doctor the pros and cons of continuing or tapering off the medicine and the timing of any changes you decide on.
- Medicines for depression are generally safe when used over long periods, and most people who stay on the treatment continue to feel a lot less depressed.
- It is important to stay with the dose that is helpful for you. Don't reduce the dose once you feel better unless the doctor recommends this. Reducing the dose often results in the depression returning.
- If you are considering reducing the dose or stopping the medicine, it is important to discuss this with your doctor. He or she may have some helpful advice.

Combining Medication with Counseling/Therapy to Treat Depression

- Many people do well with either counseling or medication treatment.
- Combined medication and therapy may be more effective than either treatment alone in some situations.
- It is not known whether combined treatment is more effective in the long term if the medicine is stopped.
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the treatment options, including combined treatment, with your health care provider to decide what approach is right for you.

For more fact sheets and information about depression and its treatment please visit: <http://depression.informedchoices.ca>



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Source: This summary provides scientifically accurate information. It was prepared in a research review by researchers and young adults with the Mobilizing Minds Research Group. The researchers are based at six universities: Manitoba, York, McMaster, Brock, Brandon, and Université Laval. Our core community partner is mindyourmind.ca located in London, Ontario. Our young adult team members are located all across the country. Last revised: 12 March 2013.

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