




A Patient
Information
Guide

Depression and Antidepressants



This guide aims to outline why antidepressants (or other treatments) may be recommended by your doctor and also provides information about how they should be used.

What is depression?

Feeling unhappy and depressed is part of the range of normal and understandable human emotions, often as a result of difficult circumstances and happenings in our lives. Everyone knows how it feels to feel sad and low. Some people find that their low mood becomes so severe that it affects their usual ability to function, for example look after themselves, in their home or at work. Normally pleasurable activities feel difficult and are not enjoyed. Sleep may be disturbed and appetite often reduced. Similarly the ability to concentrate on simple tasks like reading or watching the television can be difficult. Everyday thoughts are often bleak and thoughts of hopelessness and even suicide may be present. If such symptoms last for over a couple of weeks it is quite likely that the person is suffering from depression.

Depression can sometimes occur 'out-of-the-blue', without being connected to any recent stressful event. Very often, however, people can identify a trigger, or series of events that preceded their feelings of low mood. Ongoing stress may also be preventing them from feeling better.

Regular and/or excessive use of alcohol is also a well known cause for feeling low and depressed. Although alcohol is commonly used as a means of coping with stress, it can actually make depression worse and prevent mood from lifting. Any person feeling depressed is therefore advised to reduce and minimise their alcohol intake as much as possible.

It is very important that you seek help urgently if your symptoms are severe, particularly if you feel so depressed that you are considering some form of escape, including suicide. In such circumstances please contact your GP or NHS 24. Local helplines will also be able to offer support and advice (contact details at the back of this leaflet).

Why has my doctor recommended an antidepressant?

If your symptoms of depression are relatively mild, your mood may well lift by itself, without the need for any particular help. However, some form of help, treatment and support is usually recommended if your mood stays particularly low for a period of over two weeks. Antidepressant medication has been shown to treat and relieve the more severe types of depression. Your doctor will have recommended antidepressants as he/she believes they are an appropriate option given your current and past circumstances.

How effective are they?

Antidepressants are not recommended for the initial treatment of mild depression. They can however be particularly helpful in the treatment of moderate or more severe cases. Your doctor will be in the best position to help with a diagnosis. You will usually start to notice an improvement after taking treatment regularly for about two weeks. In general, most antidepressants are as effective as each other. If your mood does not improve after taking treatment for 4 to 6 weeks, your doctor may well recommend either a change in dose, a different preparation or offer an alternative form of treatment, for example cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). It is therefore important for you to continue to consult with your health professional, particularly if your treatment doesn't seem to be working. It is strongly advised that you do not stop taking antidepressant medication without discussing first with your doctor.

Are there additional treatments available?

Although there are many different techniques that can help, the most well researched and beneficial appear to be those utilising cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) or inter-personal therapy (IPT). A CBT self-help guide to depression is available as a companion leaflet. Many people have found that undertaking regular exercise and maintaining social activities is also helpful for lifting mood. Further details on the various 'talking' and other non-medication treatments can be found in a further companion leaflet 'Self help and Talking Therapies'.

Medication and talking treatments together seems to provide additional benefit. Other interventions can also sometimes be helpful, for example alternative medical approaches. Many have not been properly researched and therefore may not be recommended by your doctor. Your doctor will respect your decision regarding your preferred treatment choice.

What other conditions are antidepressants helpful for?

Antidepressants have also been found to be helpful treatments for a number of different conditions including anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), post traumatic stress disorder and eating disorders. Some antidepressants also have pain relieving properties.

Antidepressants and suicidal thoughts

Over recent years there have been some concerns raised about antidepressants being the cause of suicidal ideas, particular early on in treatment. Successful treatment of depression does, however, reduce the risk of suicide substantially. If you do experience the onset of suicidal ideas it is very important that you seek professional advice as a matter of urgency.

What should I do if side effects are troublesome?

It is relatively common to experience mild side effects for a few days, particularly in the first week of treatment. This may take the form of mild nausea, tummy upset or increased anxiety. These symptoms usually disappear after a few days. If side effects are more severe, you should seek the advice of your doctor. Changing the dose of medication may be all that is required.



How long should I take them for?

It is generally advised to continue taking antidepressant treatment for 6 months after your depression has lifted. If treatment is stopped before this time there is a high chance that your symptoms will return. If you have experienced two or three episodes of depression your doctor may recommend continuous treatment for two or more years. For more recurrent and severe episodes you may choose to continue antidepressant treatment indefinitely.

Are antidepressants addictive?

Antidepressants are not addictive. Some people do experience some symptoms after stopping certain treatments, particularly if this is done suddenly. A more gradual reduction in dose is usually all that is required.

What if they don't work?

Depression is a treatable illness. However, initial treatments may not always be successful. Your doctor may therefore recommend changing to a different type of antidepressant or recommend another form of treatment. Your doctor may also refer you for more specialist advice.

Some Frequently Prescribed Antidepressants

ANTIDEPRESSANT	USUAL DOSE
Fluoxetine	20-60 milligrams/day
Paroxetine	20-50 milligrams/day
Sertraline	50-200 milligrams/day
Citalopram	20-60 milligrams/day
Venlafaxine	75-375 milligrams/day
Duloxetine	60 milligrams/day
Mirtazepine	30-45 milligrams/day
Amitriptyline	75-200 milligrams/day
Imipramine	75-200 milligrams/day
Clomipramine	75-250 milligrams/day
Trazodone	150-300milligrams/day

Note: dose ranges listed are the usual recommended doses for adults. On occasions doses may be prescribed outwith these ranges.

OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES

Websites providing information on antidepressants

The following websites provide detailed factual information regarding medicines commonly prescribed for mental health conditions, including depression .

www.nmhct.nhs.uk/pharmacy – A website maintained by an NHS mental health trust in Norfolk offering comprehensive information on medicines.

<http://emc.medicines.org.uk> – Summaries of Drugs and Patient Information Leaflets Information on thousands of licensed medicines available in the UK. Continuously updated.

Websites providing information and further help for depression

www.dascot.org – Information about symptoms and treatment of depression.

www.edspace.org.uk – An information source providing a directory of local services in Edinburgh.

www.livinglifetothefull.com – Self help for depression and anxiety and related mental health issues.

www.eastlothian.gov.uk/documents/contentmanage/directory – A very useful directory of national and local East Lothian services.

www.moodgym.anu.edu.au/ – Interactive self help site for cognitive behavioural therapy for depression.

www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/about/index.cfm – Free workbooks and resources for varied mental health issues.

Further Reading

Some useful books which you may like to buy or borrow from your library. In some areas your GP can prescribe one or more of these books for you to get from your local library.

Burns, D. (2000). *Feeling Good, The New Mood Therapy* (2 rev Ed). Avon Books. New York. ISBN 0380810336.

Gilbert, P. (2000). *Overcoming Depression* (2rev. Ed). Constable and Robinson Publishing. ISBN 1841191256.

Greensberger, D and Padesky, C A (1995). *Mind Over Mood: Change How You Feel by Changing the Way You Think*. Guilford Publications. ISBN 0898621283.

Naime, K and Smith, G (2001). *Dealing With Depression* (2 Rev.Ed). Women's Press Ltd. ISBN 0704344432

Rowe, D (2003). *Depression: The Way Out of Your Prison* (3rd Ed). Brunner-Routledge. ISBN 158391286X.

Williams, C. (2006). *Overcoming Depression: A Five Areas Approach* (2nd Ed). Hodder Arnold. ISBN 0340905867.



The following organisations and help lines may also be useful:

NHS24 (www.nhs24.com) Tel: 08454 242424

– Provides comprehensive up-to-date health information and self care advice for people in Scotland.

Edinburgh Crisis Centre (www.edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk)

Freephone: 0808 801 0414 – Support for persons in Edinburgh experiencing an emotional crisis.

Association for Post Natal Illness – For women who are experiencing depression following the birth of their baby.

Address: 145 Dawes Road, London, SW6 7EB.

Tel: 0207 3860868.

Crossreach Post Natal Depression Project – Counselling for families suffering from post natal depression.

Address: Wallace House, 3 Boswall Road, Edinburgh EH5 3RJ.

Tel: 0131 538 7288.

CRUSE Bereavement Line – Help line for bereaved people and those caring for bereaved people.

Tel: 08700 1671677.

National Debt Line – Help for anyone in debt or concerned they may fall into debt.

Tel: 0808 8084000.

Couple Counselling Lothian. Tel: 0131 556 1527

West Lothian: Mood – Support and advice for people over sixty years old who have, or are at risk of, developing depression or mental health problems. Tel: 01506 651 067.

Midlothian: Early Intervention Crisis Response Service

– Tel: 0131 663 5533 (Mon – Fri 4pm–10pm; Sat & Sun 10am–4pm). Community based support for people in Midlothian who are experiencing mental health difficulties, and their carers, when they are facing a crisis.

Midlothian: Orchard Centre Service – Health in Mind.

Tel: 0131 663 1616 (Mon - Fri 9.30am–5pm, except Tues 12.30pm–5pm). Offers a wide range of information, support and activities for people with mental health problems.

East Lothian: CHANGES Community Health Project.

108 Market Street, Musselburgh EH21 6QA. Tel: 0131 653 3977 or 3813. Promotes positive wellbeing, providing a resource base and information about support for people experiencing stress, depression, panic attacks, phobias and anxiety.



Lothian – Psychological Interventions Network

