

Handy fact sheet (highlights)

Taking an antidepressant for the first time

The problem:	Why it is important:	How to help yourself:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some people are worried about taking antidepressants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depression is horrible Antidepressants can help reduce your depression and help keep you well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find out about antidepressants Remember they do work (usually in a few weeks) and aren't addictive Make up your own mind

What is depression?

Depression has many possible symptoms e.g.:

- Low mood most of the time
- Not enjoying the things you used to like
- Losing weight or change in appetite
- Feeling very tired nearly every day
- Feeling useless or guilty
- Not being able to think straight
- Thoughts of death or dying.

What are the main treatments?

The three main treatments for depression are:

- Antidepressants
- Talking (psychological) therapies, counselling
- Social support and self-help.

Do antidepressants work?

- **Yes.** But not for everyone, every time
- Antidepressants are not perfect **but they do work** and can be life-savers
- They are not just sedatives or stimulants.

How long do antidepressants take to work?

- Some of their effects occurs within **one to two weeks** (perhaps a bit longer if older)
- It may take up to 4 weeks to get the full effect.

Do antidepressants have side effects?

- Of course, but most side effects are short-term, not serious, and can be helped
- You may feel a bit sick or sleepy to start with

In the long-term, some people can have some side effects, such as:

- Weight gain (usually after a year or so)
- Problems having an erection or orgasm
- Feeling sleepy or tired (with some).

Do antidepressants cause suicide?

- No, they actually **reduce** suicidal thoughts
- **But** in the first few weeks some people can feel restless, or more anxious. This can lead to feeling unwell and thoughts of self-harm
- Be careful if you have bipolar depression (manic-depression) as antidepressants should only be used **with** a mood stabiliser.

If I start an antidepressant will I ever be able to stop?

- **Yes. Antidepressants are not 'addictive'** and you won't be stuck on them forever
- **But** coming off **many** types of medicines can be tricky – you may get discontinuation or withdrawal effects if you stop too quickly
- Talk to your prescriber if you get any symptoms
- As a general rule, you should come off an antidepressant gradually over about a week for every 6 weeks you've been taking it (up to about 6 months) – it's kinder to your brain.

How long should I take an antidepressant for once I'm better?

- If an antidepressant gets your depression better, taking it for a further 6 months cuts the chances of becoming depressed again.

We also have a more detailed version of this fact sheet