

Understanding Antidepressant Medications

Antidepressant medications are primarily used to treat depression, but they may also be used to treat other symptoms, such as anxiety and chronic pain. Antidepressant medications were first discovered in the 1950s, and new ones continue to be developed.

Antidepressant medications are effective in reducing depression and anxiety.

Antidepressant medications are frequently used in the treatment of major depression and some anxiety disorders, such as posttraumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, and social phobia. Sometimes these medications are also used to treat bipolar disorder.

Antidepressant medications are used in the treatment of major depression and other psychiatric disorders.

Antidepressant medications work by affecting neurotransmitters (chemicals in the brain). Two neurotransmitters that are important include *serotonin* and *norepinephrine*. Some antidepressant medications mainly affect serotonin; others mainly affect norepinephrine; and others affect both neurotransmitters.

Antidepressant medications work by altering chemicals in the brain called *neurotransmitters*.

FACTS ABOUT ANTIDEPRESSANT MEDICATIONS

- Antidepressant medications are usually taken by mouth.
- They are not addictive.
- The medications may work in a few days, but they usually require 4–6 weeks to become completely effective.

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- Taking antidepressant medications has two main effects:
 - They reduce the severity of depression and anxiety.
 - They lower the chances of relapses of depression and anxiety in the future.
- If symptom relapses occur, a temporary increase in antidepressant medication dosage may be helpful.

COMMON ANTIDEPRESSANT MEDICATIONS

Following is a table of the most common antidepressants. They are divided into four major groups: *tricyclic antidepressants*, *monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs)*, *selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)*, and *other compounds*.

Antidepressant Medications		
Type of drug	Brand name	Chemical name
Tricyclics	Anafranil	Clomipramine
	Elavil	Amitriptyline
	Norpramin	Desipramine
	Pamelor, Aventyl	Nortriptyline
	Sinequan, Adapin	Doxepin
	Tofranil	Imipramine
	Vivactil	Protriptyline
MAOIs	Marplan	Isocarboxazid
	Nardil	Phenelzine
	Parnate	Tranylcypromine
SSRIs	Celexa	Citalopram
	Lexapro	Escitalopram
	Luvox	Fluvoxamine
	Paxil	Paroxetine
	Prozac	Fluoxetine
	Zoloft	Sertraline
Other compounds	Desyrel	Trazodone
	Effexor	Venlafaxine
	Ludiomil	Maprotiline
	Remeron	Mirtazapine
	Serzone	Nefazodone
	Wellbutrin, Zyban	Bupropion

There are four major groups of antidepressant medications:
tricyclics, *MAOIs*, *SSRIs*, and *other compounds*.

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SIDE EFFECTS

Antidepressant medications can have some unpleasant side effects. To reduce these side effects, either the dosages or the medications themselves can be changed.

There are particular risks for people with bipolar disorder taking antidepressants. These medications may cause hypomania or mania. If this occurs, the dosages may need to be reduced or the medications stopped.

Antidepressant medications can also occasionally cause hypomanic or manic symptoms (such as increased irritability or euphoria, decreased need for sleep, inflated self-esteem, or grandiosity) in people with depression who have no prior history of such symptoms. If hypomanic or manic symptoms are observed in someone who is being treated with antidepressant medications for depression, the prescribing physician should be consulted immediately. Again, these symptoms can usually be resolved by stopping the antidepressant medications or adjusting the dosages.

The MAOIs have side effects with the chemical tyramine, which is found in certain foods and drinks. People taking MAOIs should get a complete list of the foods and beverages to be avoided from their doctor.

Following is a table of common side effects.

Drug group	Side effects
Tricyclics	Dry mouth, dizziness, sedation or agitation, weight gain, constipation, heart palpitations, cardiac abnormalities
MAOIs	Insomnia, dizziness, weight gain, sexual difficulties, confusion, memory problems, overstimulation, hypertensive crisis
SSRIs	Nausea, vomiting, excitement, agitation, headache, sexual problems (delayed ejaculation, not experiencing orgasm)
Other compounds	Same as SSRIs, plus potential to elevate blood pressure, sedation, or agitation

Antidepressant medications can have some unpleasant side effects.

The dosages can be adjusted or the medications can be changed to relieve these side effects.