

How to Take Your Antidepressant

Strategies for Success with Your New Medication for Anxiety or Depression

Antidepressant Name: _____

Your provider recently prescribed an antidepressant to help in the treatment of depression and/or anxiety. This is to help you understand your new prescription.

- Symptoms of depression may include: feelings of sadness or hopelessness, changes in appetite, difficulties with falling / staying sleep or sleeping too much, irritability, lack of energy, and loss of interest and enjoyment in your life.
- Symptoms of anxiety may include: excessive worry, restlessness, difficulty concentrating, trouble relaxing, fatigue, nervousness, irritability, panic attacks, and difficulties with sleep.

Frequently-Asked Questions:

• **How often should I take it?**

Take your antidepressant daily. We recommend that you take it at the same time every day to create the pattern of taking it. If your medication refills are running low, contact your provider.

• **How long will it take before I start to feel better?**

Most antidepressants begin to give you a benefit after 4 to 6 weeks, and some patients report feeling better sooner. However, it may take up to 12 weeks to feel the full effect. If you don't feel any better after 4 weeks, your provider might increase your dose, prescribe a second medication, or offer another solution.

• **When do I need to see my provider after starting a new antidepressant?**

Plan on follow-up visit with your provider after you start a new medication for depression or anxiety. Most people follow-up within 4 - 8 weeks, but your provider may recommend meeting sooner.

• **How long do I have to take this medication?**

Plan on taking your antidepressant for at least six months. In most cases, people take their antidepressant for six months to a year, and some take it longer. It all depends on your treatment plan and other stressors in your life. For example, if you have multiple stressors like divorce, grief, chronic pain, or unemployment, it may be helpful to stay on your antidepressant a little longer to get you through a difficult time. Do not discontinue taking your medication during periods of high stress. People with **severe** depression who recover and then go off their medications can often become depressed again.

• **What if I want to stop my antidepressant?**

Do not stop your antidepressant without talking to your provider. Some antidepressants can cause unpleasant symptoms if stopped abruptly. Your provider can help create a plan by slowly reducing the dose of your medication and find a new treatment if needed.

- ***What are the possible side effects and how can I manage them?***

In many cases, side effects go away after the first two weeks, so try to stay on the medication if you have minor side effects. If side effects do not go away or worry you, talk to your provider or nurse. Your provider may have some suggestions on how to reduce or manage them. The next section is a list of possible side effects and some strategies for managing them.

Temporary / Potential Side Effects:

Nausea, mild dizziness, or headache

Try these strategies:

- Take your antidepressant with food unless otherwise directed.
- Eat smaller, more frequent meals.
- Drink plenty of fluids, such as cool water.

Fatigue, drowsiness

Try these strategies:

- Take a brief nap during the day (less than one hour).
- Get some physical activity, such as walking.
- Take your antidepressant **at bedtime** if you are drowsy.

Difficulty sleeping, restlessness

Some antidepressants may cause a brief period of insomnia, making it difficult to fall or stay asleep, or you could wake up very early in the morning and find you are unable to return to sleep.

Try these strategies:

- Take your antidepressant **in the morning**.
- Avoid caffeinated food and drinks, particularly late in the day and/or 6 – 8 hours before bedtime.
- Get regular physical activity or exercise during the day and avoid exercise 2 hours prior to bedtime.

Less Common Side Effects:

Sexual side effects

Some antidepressants may cause sexual side effects (for example, a reduced sex drive); these generally do not go away after two weeks. If this is a concern, talk to your provider.

Note: In patients age 18-24 there is a very small risk of increase in thoughts of self-harm; please contact your provider if you have any thoughts of wanting to harm yourself, or any other concerning symptoms.

IF YOU EXPERIENCE ANY UNUSUAL SIDE EFFECTS OR HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR MEDICATIONS, CALL YOUR PROVIDER IMMEDIATELY.