

A brief guide on antidepressant medications

Antidepressant medications have demonstrated efficacy in a variety of mental health conditions. They are most often used in depressive and anxiety disorders, such as Major Depressive Disorder and Generalized Anxiety Disorder, but have also demonstrated clinical benefits in other conditions such as Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. There are two major classes of antidepressant medications, namely, the Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) and the Tricyclic Antidepressants (TCAs). There is no significant difference in efficacy between these two classes of medications, though SSRIs are generally found to be better tolerated in terms of side effects. As a result, SSRIs tend to be more commonly used, and are the first medications tried in a course of treatment.

Some examples of SSRIs

Fluoxetine (Prozac), Fluvoxamine (Faverin), Escitalopram (Lexapro), Sertraline (Zoloft)

Potential side effects

The following are some side effects that you may experience when using SSRIs:

- * Decreased appetite, feelings of bloatedness
- * Nausea, diarrhea, gastric upset
- * Nervousness, irritability, headache
- *The abovementioned side effects are often transient in nature and resolve within weeks. Medications can be given to alleviate the symptoms of these side effects.
- Sleep problems
 - Insomnia: May be more common with fluoxetine, which is therefore typically taken in the morning
 - Vivid dreams

It has been reported that SSRIs may increase the likelihood of experiencing suicidal thoughts, especially among children and adolescents. As antidepressants are often prescribed to patients with depression of at least moderate severity, such thoughts may be related to the underlying depressive illness instead of SSRI treatment. In other words, there could be a suicide risk in these patients even if they are not on SSRIs; on the other hand, if SSRIs adequately treat the underlying illness, the suicide risk may be ameliorated. Nonetheless, as it can take 2 to 4 weeks before treatment improves symptoms, it would be prudent to closely supervise the patient in the first few weeks after starting treatment.

Some examples of TCAs

Amitriptyline, Imipramine, Clomipramine

Side effects can include

- Sleepiness, drowsiness

- Dry mouth
- Blurred vision
- Constipation
- Urinary retention
- Dizziness
- Disturbances to heart rhythm

Other antidepressant medications

Venlafaxine (Effexor)	Trazodone	Mirtazapine (Remeron)
<u>Side Effects can include</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insomnia • Anxiety, dizziness • Nausea • Dry mouth • Loss of appetite • Constipation • Sweating • Agitation • High blood pressure 	<u>Side Effects can include</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dry mouth • Nausea • Headache • Weight gain • Sleepiness, drowsiness 	<u>Side Effects can include</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sleepiness, drowsiness • Dry mouth • Constipation • Fatigue • Dizziness • Gastric disturbances • Weight gain

Precaution

Special care needs to be taken if the medications above are given to elderly patients or patients with severe medical problems.

When using medications that can cause drowsiness, care should be taken when driving or operating machinery.

Concurrent use of alcohol and/or traditional Chinese medications with the medications listed above can lead to erratic absorption, which would make their effects difficult to predict.

The information provided serves as psycho-education and not a guide for self-medication. The information contained herein is not intended to cover all possible uses, directions, precautions, warnings, drug interactions, allergic reactions, or adverse effects. Please consult your psychiatrist before taking any medication.



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