

Medications for treatment of depression and anxiety symptoms

Overview

Depression and anxiety are treatable conditions. The treatment of these conditions may include psychotherapy (counselling), drug therapy, or some combination of these therapies.

Mechanism of action

Therapy with an antidepressant medication helps re-establish the normal balance of chemicals (neurotransmitters) in the brain. Low levels of neurotransmitters like serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine are thought to contribute to symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Time required for a response

For most people the full effect of a medication is not seen until four to six weeks longer. By six to eight weeks after starting an antidepressant medication, it is usually possible to determine if the medication is effective. If your symptoms have improved somewhat during this time, the dose of the medication may be increased, or a second medication may be started. If there has been no improvement in symptoms, an alternate antidepressant medication may be recommended.

Duration

In most cases, antidepressant medications are recommended for at least six to nine months. This amount of time varies greatly depending upon your situation. The decision to stop antidepressant medication should be shared between you and your provider. When antidepressants are stopped, they should be tapered slowly over two to four weeks to minimize the potential side effects associated with abruptly stopping medication. Side effects associated with stopping medication quickly can include jitteriness, dizziness, nausea, fatigue, muscle aches, chills, anxiety, and irritability.

Choice of antidepressants

Many different classes of antidepressants are effective for relieving depression and anxiety. All medications can have side effects (see table 1). It is impossible to predict which side effects an individual patient may experience. Sometimes 2 or 3 medications are tried before finding the right medication and dose for a particular patient.

More information available

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health>

<http://keltymentalhealth.ca/>

www.mayo.org

<http://www.nami.org/>

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>

Chances of side effects with certain antidepressant medications

Generic name	Brand name	Dry mouth, Blurred vision, Trouble urinating, Constipation, Dizziness	Drowsiness	Trouble sleeping, jitteriness	Nausea, vomiting, Diarrhea	Weight gain	Sexual problems
Selective Serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI's)							
Citalopram	Celexa	None	None	Very low	Very low	Very low	Moderate
Escitalopram	Cipralex	None	None	Very low	Very low	Very low	Moderate
Fluoxetine	Prozac	None	None	Low	Very low	Very low	Moderate
Paroxetine	Paxil	Very low	Very low	Very low	Very low	Low	High
Sertraline	Zoloft	None	None	Low	Low (diarrhea)	Very low	Moderate
Atypical agents							
Bupropion	Wellbutrin	None	None	Very low	Very low	None	None
Mirtazapine	Remeron	Very low	High	None	None	High	Very low
Serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRI)							
Desvenlafaxine	Pristiq	None	Very low	Low	Very low	None	Moderate
Duloxetine	Cymbalta	None	None	Low	Low	None	Moderate
Venlafaxine	Effexor	None	Very low	Low	Very low	None	moderate

All SSRI's and SNRI's can cause nausea and stomach upset at first or when increasing dose. This usually goes away after about one week.