



Antidepressant FAQ

If you are talking with your doctor about starting an anti-depressant, it is important to understand what to expect from the medications. It is also very important that you speak with your provider and the nursing staff before stopping medications, changing the dose, or if you have concerns about medications. Make sure to notify your dialysis care team of any medication changes.

What are antidepressants?

Antidepressants are medications designed to help the symptoms of clinical depression and other conditions like anxiety and sleep difficulty.

How do antidepressants work?

Antidepressants work by adjusting certain chemicals (neurotransmitters) in the brain.

Are antidepressants addictive?

No, antidepressants are not addictive.

How might antidepressants help me?

Scientific research has shown that people who take antidepressants and make changes in their daily habits experience more relief from their depression and/or anxiety sooner than people who do not.

Who can prescribe me antidepressants?

Your primary care provider, psychiatric provider, or other specialists may prescribe antidepressant medication for you.

Why has my primary care provider tried me on one antidepressant when I heard from a friend that they started taking another?

Different antidepressants will affect different people in different ways. Your provider may have to try several medications before they find one that works well for you.

When can I expect my antidepressants to work?

It may take 10-21 days before you notice any reduction in symptoms; this will depend on the specific medication prescribed and your response to the medication. It may take up to three months for symptoms to significantly decrease.

What kind of symptoms may be improved if I start taking antidepressants?

Sleep	Sex Drive	Feeling physically slowed down
Appetite	Restlessness	Feeling worse in the morning
Fatigue	Agitation	Poor Concentration

Can I drink alcohol while taking antidepressants?

Do not drink alcohol if you are taking antidepressant medication. Alcohol can block the effects of the medication. If you desire to drink occasionally, discuss this with your provider.

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What kind of symptoms may not be improved if I start taking antidepressants?

Some symptoms like depressed mood and low self-esteem may respond only partially to medication. The medication you'll be taking is not a "happy pill;" it is unlikely to totally erase feelings of sadness or emptiness.

How long will it take before I begin to feel better?

Typically, it may take up to three months for the major depressive symptoms to significantly decrease. In general, medication treatment goes at least six months beyond the point of symptom improvement. Occasionally, a person may need to be on long-term medication management.

Will I experience any side effects?

There is the possibility of side effects and some people may experience one or two of the following. However, these side effects usually go away in 7-10 days and can often be managed by changing the dose or by changing medication. *Please call your provider if you have concerns about side effects.*

Dry Mouth - Chew sugarless gum, eat sugarless candy, take sips of water or eat ice, but watch out for too much fluid intake.

Constipation - Eat more fiber rich foods, take a stool softener.

Drowsiness - Take frequent walks, take medication earlier in the evening, or, if taking medication during the day, ask your doctor if you can take it at night.

Wakefulness - Take medications early in the day.

Blurred Vision - Remind yourself that this is a temporary difficulty; talk with provider if it continues.

Headache - Usually temporary and can often be managed by aspirin or acetaminophen, if needed and as directed by your doctor.

Feeling Antsy - Tell yourself this will go away in 3-5 days. If not, call your provider.

Sexual Problems - Talk with your provider; a change in medications may help.

Nausea or Appetite Loss - Take medication with food.

Adapted from the "Antidepressant Medications" Handout from the Center for Integrated Healthcare, Department of Veterans Affairs