

## MEDICATION INFORMATION FOR YOUTH

# Antidepressants: Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) and Atypicals

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Doctor's name

Medication

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### Why You Are Taking This Medicine

Antidepressants help people who feel very sad or depressed, but they also help children and adolescents with other problems. These problems could be having trouble paying attention, being too active (“hyperactive”), feeling too anxious (nervous), or having obsessions (uncomfortable thoughts that won’t go away) or compulsions (habits that get in the way of daily life).

### What the Medicine Is Called and How You Take It

The medicine you are taking is called an *antidepressant*. There are many different kinds of antidepressants. They work in different ways, and your doctor will choose the one he or she feels is best for you depending on your particular problems. The name of your medicine may be confusing. Most drugs have two names: (1) a scientific name that we call a *generic name* and (2) a trade or *brand name*. Some of the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and atypicals are listed in the following table:

<b>Brand name</b>	<b>Generic name</b>
Celexa	citalopram
Desyrel	trazodone
Effexor	venlafaxine
Luvox	fluvoxamine
Paxil	paroxetine
Prozac	fluoxetine
Remeron	mirtazapine
Serzone	nefazodone
Wellbutrin	bupropion
Zoloft	sertraline

Some of these medicines need to be taken only once a day. Others must be taken two or even three times a day. Your doctor will tell you how often to take your medicine so that it can help you the most. It is **very important** that you take **all** the pills you are supposed to take each day. Your doctor will probably recommend that you take your medicine at the same time each day,

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which may be with meals or at bedtime. It usually takes some time for the effects to be noticed. In fact, some of these medicines do not take full effect until several weeks after you start taking them. You may feel discouraged and think they are never going to help. You may want to give up and stop taking the medicine. Talk to your doctor and parent(s) about how you feel, but **do not stop** taking your medicine unless your doctor tells you to. It is also important not to take extra pills hoping that you will feel better faster. Doing that could make you very sick.

Some medicines are started at the amount you will take for as long as you are taking that medicine. Other medicines need to be increased or adjusted until your doctor decides you are taking the right amount. Starting at a low dose and increasing it slowly may lessen side effects. If the medicine helps you, your doctor will probably want you to take it for 6 months to a year if you are taking it to treat depression. If you are taking it to treat another problem, then your doctor will decide how long you will need to take the medicine as he or she watches your progress.

Do not use any other medicines without talking to your doctor first. Do not use alcohol, marijuana, or street drugs while taking these pills. They can cause serious side effects. Skipping your medicine to take drugs does not work because many of the medicines stay in your body for a long time.

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### **How Your Doctor Will Follow Your Progress**

Your doctor or nurse will examine you, measure your height and weight, and check your pulse rate and blood pressure before giving you this medicine. He or she will check these measurements regularly while you are taking the medicine. Be sure to tell the doctor or nurse about other medicines you are taking, including vitamins, herbs, or diet supplements. Also tell him or her if you are using alcohol or drugs or if you might be pregnant. For some of these medicines, you also may need to take a test called an electrocardiogram or ECG. This simple test counts your heartbeats through small wires that are taped to your chest. It takes only a few minutes. This test may be needed when your medicine is increased and every 6 months to a year while you are taking the medicine. In addition, blood tests are needed before starting some of these medicines.

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### **How the Medicine Will Make You Feel**

In addition to the ways the medicine will help you, it may have other effects called *side effects*. Different medicines have different side effects. It is helpful to know about some of the most common side effects of your medicine so that you will understand what they are if they happen. Some people do not have any side effects. You could have an allergy to any medicine, which might show up as a rash on your skin, swelling, itching or trouble breathing. Some side effects are just uncomfortable, but others may mean that your body is having a problem with the medicine. Please tell your parent(s) and your doctor or nurse if you think that you may have any side effects.

One of the most common side effects of antidepressants is feeling tired or sleepy during the day, even if you have had a full night's sleep. After you have been taking the medicine for a few weeks, your body will adjust, and this side effect may go away. If you have had trouble sleeping at night, the medicine can help you sleep better, especially when you take a dose of medicine at night. Sometimes after being on the medicine for a while, people don't care as much about school or friends. Changing the dose or the type of medicine can fix this. Other people may feel more restless and excited. Tell your parent(s) or doctor if this is uncomfortable.

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Another common side effect is dryness of the mouth. You may be more thirsty than usual and find that you are drinking more water or other liquids than usual. Sucking on sugar-free hard candy or cough drops usually helps. You also could try chewing sugar-free gum or sucking on ice chips. Don't chew the ice; you could hurt your teeth. Also, using lip balm (such as Chap Stick) on your lips will keep them from cracking.

Sometimes people taking antidepressants notice that their heart is beating a little faster than normal. Usually this happens within the first few weeks of taking the medicine and gets better or goes away. However, if you notice that your heart is beating very fast for more than a few minutes when you have not been exercising, if you feel light-headed or dizzy when you are sitting or standing still, or if you faint, you should let your parent(s) and doctor know right away.

In hot weather, it is very important to drink enough water and not to get overheated.

Other side effects happen less often, including not feeling hungry and not wanting to eat much; eating more than usual; feeling irritable; or having itchy skin, a skin rash, or swelling. You should let your parent(s) and doctor know if you notice anything different or unusual about how you feel once you start taking the medicine. This includes good things, such as feeling less sad or less nervous or sleeping better at night. You may have a change in your sexual functioning, so please talk to your doctor about this.

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### **How to Explain Your Medicine to Others**

You do not have to tell others that you are taking this medicine, but it is not something you should feel ashamed of or embarrassed by. Many children and teenagers are helped by antidepressants. These medicines are not habit forming, and you cannot become "hooked" on them. You should talk to your doctor or nurse about any questions you have about the medicine. It is important to remember that the medicine *helps* you. It cannot *make* you do anything or change you as a person.

**After reading this information and discussing it with your parent(s), write any questions you have in the space below and share these with your doctor or nurse on your next visit.**

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From Dulcan MK, Lizarralde C (editors): *Helping Parents, Youth, and Teachers Understand Medications for Behavioral and Emotional Problems: A Resource Book of Medication Information Handouts*, Second Edition. Washington, DC, American Psychiatric Publishing, 2003.