

Antidepressants: Should I or Shouldn't I?

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Although we live in a generation with access to powerful tools to treat serious depression, many argue that too many antidepressants are being prescribed. Thus, determining who really could benefit from them may be confusing.

Occasionally having the "blues" is a normal part of life, but feeling a sense of debilitating sadness is a serious matter. As compared to the "blues", moderate to serious depression impacts your ability to work, parent, and socialize. Signs that you may be experiencing depression versus the "blues" include:

- Sleeping difficulties
- Forgetful, poor concentration
- Irritability
- Increase/decrease appetite
- Low energy
- Feeling hopeless, worthless
- Unexplained pain
- Diminished interest
- Isolation

Experiencing persistent symptoms requires immediate attention for an evaluation and possible treatment. Treatment for severe depression may include antidepressant medication. Less severe symptoms may be addressed by lifestyle changes below:

Quality multivitamins, B complex vitamins, B12, omega three fatty acids

- Psychotherapy
- Exercise 3-4 days per week
- Meditation, yoga, massages
- Sleep 7-8 hours EVERY night
- Resolve conflict areas and relationships
- Spiritual life enhancement
- Stop alcohol use

If an antidepressant is necessary, there must be a commitment for daily use, partnered with the above lifestyle changes. Expect your healthcare professional to discuss their rationale for antidepressant treatment, keeping in mind that antidepressants do not cure depression. They work by reducing symptoms, and must be taken 8-10 weeks to determine effectiveness and dose. Following initial stages of treatment, a 6-9 month medication trial is usually recommended.

There are several types of antidepressants that are considered first line- Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors, Serotonin & Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitor, and Atypical Antidepressants. These work equally well. However, medication choice is often dictated by both side effects and the following factors:

- Individual symptom profile
- Pregnancy/breast feeding
- Interaction with other medications or illnesses
- Response of a close relative to a certain antidepressant
- Weight concerns

No matter the treatment regimen you are prescribed, being consistent with its implementation and having an ongoing dialogue with your healthcare provider is essential for successful treatment of depression, mild to severe.