

seniors and depression

concerns about medications



Medications can take several weeks before you notice a difference.

Although anti-depressant medications have been around for years, there are still a great number of misconceptions about how they work and the effects they have; antidepressants have always been as effective as they are now but newer medications may have less side effects. Each year new antidepressant medications are researched and made available to the public for symptom relief. Each person might have their reasons for choosing one medication over another and these decisions can be made with your health care provider.

Some people are concerned about taking psychiatric medications; below are some common concerns people have as well as some information to help you make a choice.

I've tried medication before. It doesn't work for me.

There are many different options when it comes to medication, each individual reacts to them differently. It may be possible that the medication you were on was not right for you. Talk to your doctor about the medication that will be best for you and about any side effects you have experienced in the past.

“Antidepressants are not addictive and they do not change your personality”

I don't need medication. I can do this on my own.

There is a possibility you can deal with depression on our own if your depression is mild. If your depression is moderate or severe antidepressants are generally included in the treatment plan because they can help stabilize your mood on a regular basis, even if your depression comes in cycles or episodes. Without medication, you may eventually feel better, but you are far more likely to experience recurring episodes of depression. For chronic problems with depression, home treatments may not work at all and your mood will continue to decline making you a risk for suicide and increased physical health problems.

I've been taking my antidepressants for two weeks now, and I don't feel any different.

It typically takes four to six weeks until a significant improvement in mood is felt. If you still don't feel any better after that point, you may need to alter the dosage of your medication, or possibly switch medications. Make sure to discuss any changes in mood with your doctor. If after four to six weeks you notice no change, discuss this with your doctor. Ideally you will see your doctor weekly or bi weekly when taking a new medication, that way you and your doctor can keep track of the effect of any medications being taken.

If I take antidepressants, I'll be taking them for the rest of my life.

Most seniors who begin to use antidepressants do not stop treatment; it is true that some individuals may benefit from short-term use of medication, this depends on the severity of your depression. Ask your doctor how long you might expect to be on medication.

Antidepressants cause weight gain.

Weight gain is more frequently a side effect of depression than of antidepressants. Once you are feeling better, you may lose weight you have accumulated while depressed. However, if this is of particular concern to you, discuss with your doctor medications that have no weight-gain side effects.

I won't take mood-altering drugs.

Antidepressants are not addictive and they do not change your personality, desires, or decision-making ability. They work by fixing chemical problems in the brain; much like diabetes medication adjusts improper insulin levels in an individual.

Antidepressants make you suicidal.

While there have been studies that show increased suicidal tendencies arising in the first few weeks of treatment, this side effect is very uncommon. During this period, you should be meeting with your doctor on a weekly or biweekly schedule and be sure to report any suicidal feelings you may have. Don't forget that antidepressants are meant to make you feel better, not worse, and they would not be prescribed to you for any other reason.

If you have any other questions about how medication works, or how it may affect you and your lifestyle, talk to your doctor about what course of action is right for you.

Below are some resources for more information.

Mood Disorders Association of BC www.mdabc.net, 604.873.0103, toll free 1.855.282.7979

BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information, www.heretohelp.bc.ca

Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health www.ccsmh.ca, 416.785.2500 ext. 6331

Crisis Centre Seniors' Distress Line 604.872.1234, www.crisiscentre.bc.ca



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