

# WHICH ANTIDEPRESSANTS SHOULD I TAKE?



- Many new antidepressant drugs are now available.
- These new drugs are effective and are generally safer than the older antidepressants.
- The older types of antidepressants are still used to treat severe depression.
- Your doctor will provide you with information about the type of antidepressant that will best suit your needs.
- It is very important to tell your doctor if there is any chance that you are pregnant.
- If you are breastfeeding an infant you *must* inform your doctor.

## TYPES OF ANTIDEPRESSANTS

**Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs):** This class includes sertraline (Zoloft), citalopram (Cipramil, Ciazil, Talohexal), paroxetine (Aropax, Paxtine), fluoxetine (Prozac, Erocap, Lovan, Zactin, Auscap) and fluvoxamine (Luvox, Faverin). SSRIs are now the most commonly prescribed antidepressants in Australia. These antidepressants are the first choice for most types of depression. SSRIs have many advantages over the older types of antidepressants (tricyclics) as they are highly effective with relatively few side-effects. They are generally non-sedating and are safe in the event of accidental or deliberate overdose. The common side-effects of the SSRIs include nausea, agitation, sleep disturbance, sexual dysfunction and headaches. Some SSRIs can interact with other medications. Stopping some SSRIs suddenly can cause an unpleasant withdrawal syndrome.

### Other antidepressants:

**Serotonin and noradrenaline reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs):** The only SNRI currently available in Australia is venlafaxine (Efexor, Efexor-XR). As for SSRIs, SNRIs are considered safer in the case of overdose and have less side-effects compared to the older antidepressants. This class of drug is particularly effective in severe depression. Common side-effects include nausea, anxiety, fatigue, sexual dysfunction and headaches. Withdrawal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, dizziness, agitation, sleep disturbance and tearfulness can occur if this medication is suddenly ceased.

**Tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs):** Common members of this class include nortriptyline (Allegron), clomipramine (Anafranil), dothiepin (Prothiaden, Dothep), imipramine (Tofranil) and amitriptyline (Tryptanol, Endep). These older antidepressant agents are highly effective but have more side-effects than the newer drugs. Common side-effects include sedation/ sleepiness,

dry mouth, constipation, low blood pressure and falls. TCAs must be discontinued slowly, or withdrawal symptoms may occur. This type of antidepressant can also cause death if taken in overdose.

**Reversible inhibitors of monoamine oxidase - A (RIMAs):** Moclobemide (Aurorix, Arima) is the only available RIMA in Australia. This antidepressant is non-sedating and has few side-effects. In the view of many psychiatrists, this antidepressant may be less effective in more severe forms of depression than some other agents. Moclobemide may be more helpful in patients who are experiencing significant symptoms of fatigue.

**Noradrenaline-serotonin specific antidepressants (NaSSAs):** Mirtazapine (Avanza, Remeron) is a relatively new antidepressant agent. This antidepressant can be particularly helpful in cases where there are problems with anxiety or difficulty sleeping. A lack of sexual side-effects is another advantage. Common side-effects such as sedation, dizziness and increased appetite with weight gain can cause problems for some people.

**Serotonin 5HT<sub>2</sub> antagonists:** Nefazodone (Serzone) is also useful in improving sleep and reducing anxiety symptoms. This medication has no sexual side-effects and no significant problems with withdrawal. Side-effects such as sleepiness and dizziness and interactions with some other drugs are potential problems. This antidepressant is due to be withdrawn from sale in Australia in 2004.

**Noradrenaline reuptake inhibitors (NARIs):** Reboxetine (Edronax) acts selectively on noradrenaline levels, which are associated with improving mood and increasing energy. This type of medication should not cause sleepiness or drowsiness but may cause insomnia and increased sweating after the initial doses. Other reported side-effects include dry mouth, constipation, agitation, dizziness and headache. Some patients may also experience sexual difficulties, difficulty urinating and increased heart rate.

Source: Hickie et al. Educational Health Solutions; 2000. Reproduced with permission [<http://www.spheregp.com.au>]

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**TABLE 1. ANTIDEPRESSANT CHOICES FOR A VARIETY OF CLINICAL SITUATIONS\***

The table below shows the top three choices of antidepressant drugs for a range of depression and anxiety disorders.

CLINICAL SITUATION	1st CHOICE	2nd CHOICE	3rd CHOICE
Major depression	SSRIs	SNRIs	5HT2 antagonists/RIMAs
Mixed depression and anxiety	SSRIs	5HT2 antagonists	SNRIs/RIMAs
Major depression with sleep	SSRIs	5HT2 antagonists	TCAs
Major depression with panic disorder	SSRIs	TCAs	5HT2 antagonists/RIMAs/ SNRIs
Treatment-resistant depression	SNRIs	SSRIs	TCAs
Post-natal major depression	SSRIs	TCAs	SNRIs
Adolescent with major	SSRIs	SNRIs	RIMAs
Older patient with major depression	SSRIs	SNRIs	RIMAs
Concurrent medical illness	SSRIs	SNRIs/RIMAs	SNRIs/RIMAs
Patient with chronic fatigue	SSRIs	RIMAs	SNRIs
Patient with chronic pain	TCAs	SSRIs	SNRIs

\*Hickie IB, Scott EM, Davenport TA. Are Antidepressants all the same? Surveying the opinions of Australian psychiatrists. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 1999; 33:642-649.

## MORE INFORMATION

[beyondblue fact sheet - Why do I need to take antidepressant drugs?](#)  
[beyondblue fact sheet - What do the common antidepressants treat?](#)

### Learn about other treatments for depression and anxiety:

Coping strategies [[http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link\\_id=1.14](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link_id=1.14)]  
[beyondblue fact sheet - Cognitive and other psychological therapies](#)  
[beyondblue fact sheet - Alternative treatments](#)

[myDr](http://www.mydr.com.au) [[www.mydr.com.au](http://www.mydr.com.au)]

Visit their website for more information on the side-effects of antidepressants.

[BluePages](http://bluepages.anu.edu.au) [<http://bluepages.anu.edu.au>]

BluePages provides information about depression for consumers and provides comprehensive information about antidepressants as well as other treatments.