

Medication and YOUTH

A RESOURCE FOR YOUTH BY YOUTH

Research has shown that a type of antidepressants, called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), can help to reduce the symptoms of depression in young people. This resource will tell you more about SSRIs.

What are SSRIs?

They are a group of medications that can help with symptoms of depression and are also commonly used to relieve symptoms of anxiety. SSRIs include fluoxetine (Prozac), citalopram (Celexa), escitalopram (Cipralax) and sertraline (Zoloft).

While medication has been shown to be effective, other options can help too, like therapy and doing activities that you enjoy or find relaxing.



When will I know if this medication is working for me?

It can take at least three to six weeks, and occasionally as long as eight weeks, to feel the benefits of the medication.

Between half and two-thirds of youth find it helpful. You'll need to take them every day to see a benefit.

What are some of the side-effects?

Many young people don't notice any side-effects, but they are possible. Some common side-effects are listed below. If you do experience side-effects, they may lessen over time. If you do not notice a benefit from your medication or experience many side-effects, talk to your doctor.

Common Side-Effects If you are experiencing...

Some Tips Try to...

Difficulty sleeping, or having more energy than usual and feeling restless	Avoid caffeine or take your medication in the morning
Tiredness or drowsiness	Take your medication in the evening
Headaches or dizziness	Take time to rest or relax or drink water
Nausea or decreased appetite	Take your medication with food or eating smaller meals more often during the day
Some other symptoms may include sweating, diarrhea, increased heart rate, vivid dreams, or changes in sexual drive and function.	

Some people may also start to feel emotionally numb, but this isn't the goal of this medication. Please let your therapist or doctor know if this is happening.

There are also some less frequent but more severe side-effects.

- Many people experience a decrease in suicidal thoughts after taking SSRIs, but about five per cent of youth can have *increased thoughts of suicide or self harm*. If you notice this happening, you should speak to your doctor right away. The doctor may have you stop taking your medication, or advise a change to your medication. **If you're concerned about your own safety, go to an emergency room for immediate support.**
- People may rarely experience *mania*, where they might notice having more energy, having trouble sleeping, feeling very irritable or having an extremely high mood.

What happens if I take an SSRI with other medications or substances?



If you are taking other medications (prescription, over the counter or herbal), talk to your doctor or pharmacist to see how this combination might affect you.

Combining substances like alcohol, cannabis or other recreational drugs with SSRIs can:

- reduce the chances that the medication will work
- make the effects of the drug more unpredictable (e.g., you may feel drowsy, have memory problems or act impulsively)
- exaggerate the effect that the drug would normally have for you.

If you are taking an SSRI while using other substances, you may want to use a smaller amount of the substance to see how it affects you. If you do use substances, be sure there is a trusted friend around, you are in a familiar location, or have a supportive adult who you can call if something unexpected happens.

Will I become dependent on this type of medication?

SSRIs are not addictive. If your medication is working and you stop taking it, you are more likely to have your symptoms of depression return. It can take weeks or months for this to happen – though some people might notice discomfort immediately after stopping.

There are many different ways to help treat depression. If you wish to stop taking medication, talk to your doctor about gradually decreasing the dose.

Are there any other tips that I should know?

Try to take your medication at a set time to help you remember, and avoid taking doses too close together. It can help to set an alarm as a reminder.

Remember to have enough medication when you will be away from home. If you're travelling, keep medication in the original bottle. If you're away for the day, you can use a discreet container to keep it in.

Ask your pharmacist if your medication is affected by grapefruit. Grapefruit can prevent your body from breaking down some SSRIs.

Try to store your medication outside of the kitchen and bathroom. Changes in temperature may impact the effectiveness.

Keep medications out of reach of young children.

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you want more information. They can also tell you what may be covered by insurance. Most pharmacies offer a refill reminder. Talk to your therapist or doctor about using a rating scale to track your symptoms so it will be easier to notice if they are changing. Rating scales are like surveys that ask how you are feeling. Two common ones are the "Mood and Feelings Questionnaire" and "Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale."



If you have depression, figuring out what may be helpful for you is an individual process and may look different for everyone. Medications can be one way of supporting yourself.