



Patient and Caregiver Information on SSRI Antidepressants

The name of your medication is _____.
It belongs to a class of antidepressants called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI).

What is this drug used for?

SSRI antidepressants are used in the treatment of a number of disorders including:

- Major depressive disorder, bipolar depression
- Generalized anxiety disorder
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Panic disorder
- Bulimia and other eating disorders
- Social anxiety disorder
- Premenstrual dysphoria or depression
- Posttraumatic stress disorder

These drugs are also used to treat several other disorders. Ask your doctor if you are not sure why you are taking this drug.

Note: These medications may not have formal approval by regulatory agencies such as Health Canada or the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in children or adolescents for some or all of the above uses.

How quickly will the drug start working?

SSRI antidepressants begin to improve sleep and appetite and to increase energy within 1–2 weeks; however, feelings of depression may take 4–6 weeks to improve. Because antidepressants take time to work, **do not decrease or increase the dose or stop the medication** without discussing this with your doctor.

Improvement in symptoms related to anxiety disorders such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, and symptoms of bulimia also occurs gradually.

How long should you take this medication?

This depends on what type of illness you have and how well you do. Following the first episode of depression, it is usually recommended that antidepressants be continued for a minimum of 1 year; this decreases the chance of having another episode. Your doctor may then decrease the drug slowly and monitor for any symptoms of depression; if none occur, the drug can gradually be stopped.

For individuals who have had several episodes of depression, antidepressant medication should be continued indefinitely. **DO NOT STOP** taking your medication if you are feeling better, without first discussing this with your doctor.

Long-term treatment is generally recommended for obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, and bulimia.

What side effects may happen?

Side effects may happen with any drug. They are not usually serious and do not happen to everyone. Side effects may sometimes occur before beneficial effects of the medication are noticed. If you think you may be having a side effect, speak to your doctor or pharmacist as they can help you decrease it or cope with it.

Common side effects that should be reported to your doctor at the **NEXT VISIT** include:

- Feeling sleepy or tired – this problem goes away with time. Use of other drugs that make you drowsy will worsen the problem. Avoid driving a car or operating machinery until you know how the drug affects you. If drowsiness persists, your doctor may advise you to take the medication at bedtime.
- Energizing/agitated feeling – some individuals may feel nervous or have difficulty sleeping for a few days after starting this medication. Report this to your doctor; he/she may advise you to take the medication in the morning.
- Headache – this tends to be temporary and can be managed by taking a pain reliever (such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen) when required. If the headache persists or is “troubling,” contact your doctor.
- Nausea or heartburn – if this happens, take the medication with food.
- Muscle tremor, twitching – speak to your doctor as this may require a change in your dosage.
- For adolescents: changes in sex drive or sexual performance – discuss this with your doctor.
- Sweating – you may sweat more than usual; frequent showering and use of antiperspirants may help.
- Blurred vision – this usually happens when you first start the drug and tends to be temporary. Reading under a bright light or at a distance may help; a magnifying glass can be of temporary use. If the problem lasts for more than a few weeks, let your doctor know.
- Dry mouth – sour candy and sugarless gum help increase saliva in your mouth. Do not drink sweet drinks like colas as they may give you cavities and increase your weight. Drink water and brush your teeth regularly.
- Constipation – drink plenty of water and try to increase the amount of fiber in your diet (like fruit, vegetables or bran). Some individuals find a bulk laxative like psyllium (e.g., Metamucil) or PEG 3350 (e.g., Miralax, Pegalax) or a stool softener like docusate (e.g., Colace, Surfak) helps regulate their bowels. If these remedies are not effective, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.
- Nightmares – can be managed by changing the time you take your drug, speak with your doctor.
- Loss of appetite.

Rare side effects you should report to your doctor **RIGHT AWAY** include:

- Sore mouth, gums or throat
- Skin rash or itching, swelling of the face
- Any unusual bruising or bleeding, increased nosebleeds or blood in your stool
- Nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, feeling tired, weak, feverish or like you have the flu
- Yellow tinge in the eyes or to the skin; dark-colored urine (pee)
- Going a day or more without peeing
- Tingling in the hands and feet, severe muscle twitching
- **Severe agitation, restlessness, irritability, or thoughts of suicide**
- **Switch in mood to an unusual state of happiness, excitement, irritability, or problems sleeping**

Let your doctor know **right away** if you miss your period or think you may be **pregnant**, plan to become pregnant, or are breastfeeding.

What should you do if you forget to take a dose of your medication?

If you take your total dose of this medication in the morning and you forget to take it for more than 6 hours, skip the missed dose and continue with your schedule the next day. **DO NOT DOUBLE THE DOSE.** If you take the drug several times a day, take the missed dose when you remember, then continue with your regular schedule.

Is this drug safe to take with other medication?

Because SSRI antidepressant drugs can change the effect of other medication, or may be affected by other medication, always check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking other drugs, including those you can buy without a prescription, such as cold remedies and herbal preparations. Always inform any doctor or dentist that you see that you are taking an antidepressant drug.

Precautions/considerations

1. Do not change your dose without talking with your health care provider (e.g., doctor, pharmacist, nurse).
2. Do not stop this drug suddenly (without discussing it with your health care provider), as this may result in withdrawal symptoms such as muscle aches, chills, tingling in your hands or feet, nausea, vomiting, and dizziness.
3. Take your drug with meals or with water, milk, orange or apple juice; avoid grapefruit juice as it may change the effect of the drug in your body.
4. If you are taking a controlled-release medication (e.g., paroxetine (Paxil CR), fluvoxamine (Luvox CR), fluoxetine/olanzapine combination (Symbyax), or enteric-coated capsules (e.g., fluoxetine (Prozac Weekly))) swallow the drug whole. Do not split, crush or chew the tablet/capsule, as this will affect the action of the medication.
5. This drug may impair the mental and physical abilities required for driving a car or operating machinery. Avoid these activities if you feel drowsy or slowed down.
6. This drug may increase the effects of alcohol, making you more sleepy, dizzy, and lightheaded. If taken together with alcohol, this may make it dangerous for you to drive, operate machinery, or perform tasks that require careful attention.
7. Report any changes in mood or behavior to your doctor.
8. This drug may interact with medication prescribed by your dentist, so let him/her know the name of the drug you are taking.
9. Oral disintegrating tablets of citalopram (Celexa) or escitalopram (Cipralext Meltz) should be placed under the tongue and may be taken with or without liquid.
10. Excessive use of caffeinated foods, drugs or beverages may increase anxiety and agitation and confuse the diagnosis.
11. Store your medication in a clean, dry area at room temperature. Keep all medication out of the reach of children.

If you have any questions regarding this medication, please ask your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse.