

Patient Information on SSRI Antidepressants

Citalopram (Celexa®), Escitalopram (Cipralex®), Fluoxetine (Prozac®), Fluvoxamine (Luvox®), Paroxetine (Paxil®), Sertraline (Zoloft®) and generic brands

What is this medication used for?

This medication belongs to the class of medications called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI) antidepressants. The most common conditions they are used for are:

- Depression (Major Depressive Disorder or Bipolar Depression)
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Panic Disorder
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Social Phobia

This medication is usually taken once a day. Your physician may advise you on whether to take in morning or bedtime. The medication can be taken with or without food; taking with food may lessen stomach upset at the beginning of treatment.

How will this medication help me?

This medication can help symptoms such as:

- Depressive symptoms - low mood, changes in appetite and sleep, low energy, difficulty concentrating, decreased interest in normal activities, feelings of guilt
- Anxiety symptoms - excessive worry or trouble controlling worry, physical feelings of anxiety
- OCD symptoms – reduces obsessive thoughts and compulsions
- Panic - helps prevent panic attacks and PTSD symptoms

When will the medication start working?

Antidepressants may improve sleep, appetite and energy within 1-2 weeks after reaching an adequate dose; however, feelings of low mood, panic, or anxiety may take 4-12 weeks to fully improve. OCD symptoms also require a longer (8-12 week) trial to evaluate how well the medication works.

Because the medication takes time to work, do not change the dose or stop the medication without discussing this with your doctor. Your doctor may increase or decrease the medication slowly to decrease side effects. Stopping the medication suddenly may result in uncomfortable withdrawal effects like muscle aches, tingling feelings, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, sleep disturbances, headache, tremor or anxiety.

How long should I take this medication for?

After a first episode of depression, it is recommended that the antidepressant be continued for at least one year; this prevents a relapse of the depression. For people who have had several episodes of depression, lifelong treatment with medication is recommended. Do not stop the medication without discussing it first with your doctor - some antidepressants need to be tapered slowly to avoid side effects. If you are taking antidepressants for other reasons, check with your doctor about how long to take it; most people require at least one year of treatment.

Side effects:

Many side effects are worse at the start of treatment and get better or disappear over a few weeks. If a side effect continues, speak to your doctor about how to manage it.

- Headache – Usually is temporary. Can be managed with painkillers (e.g. acetaminophen / Tylenol®).
- Drowsiness and feeling tired – Usually improves over time. Take a dose at bedtime if this happens.
- Energized, anxious or agitated feeling – Some people may feel nervous or have difficulty sleeping for a few days after starting the medication. If the medication disturbs your sleep or if you get nightmares, take it in the morning.
- Nausea, diarrhea, or heartburn – Usually goes away with time. Taking medication with a meal may help.
- Constipation – Increase bulk foods in your diet (vegetables, brown breads, fruit) and drink plenty of water. If constipation is still a problem, consult your doctor or pharmacist.
- Loss of appetite or weight loss; also possible is weight gain (most likely to happen with paroxetine) – Discuss this with your doctor.
- Dry mouth – Ice cubes, sipping water, and sugarless gum help increase saliva in your mouth (avoid sweet juices or pop). For severe dry mouth, moisture sprays / gels for the mouth can be bought at a pharmacy – ask the pharmacist about what products are available.
- Increased sweating (most likely with paroxetine) – Frequent showering and use of antiperspirant can help. If sweating is severe, ask your pharmacist about stronger antiperspirants that are available.
- Tremor - Discuss this with your doctor if it occurs.
- Decrease in sex drive or sexual function – Discuss this with your doctor if it occurs.

- Suicidal thinking - A small percentage of young adults (24 or younger) may have an increase in suicidal thinking and behaviour after starting an SSRI. In studies, this happens in about 4% of young adults compared to 2% taking a placebo (dummy pill). Young adults should be closely monitored when starting an antidepressant. Anyone with new or worsening suicidal thoughts should contact their doctor immediately.

This is not a complete list of side effects. If you feel unwell, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

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

If you forget a morning dose, you can take it later in the same day if you remember. If you take your total dose in the evening and you forget it, take it the next day in the evening as usual.

Interactions with other medications

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about any other medications you are taking, including herbal remedies and medications that you can buy at the pharmacy. Always inform any doctor or dentist you see that you are taking this medication.

Other Precautions

- Do not drive a car or operate heavy machinery if you feel drowsy or slowed down.
- This drug may increase the effects of alcohol, making you feel more sleepy, dizzy or lightheaded.
- Avoid eating grapefruit or drinking grapefruit juice if you are taking fluvoxamine or sertraline. Grapefruit juice can increase the levels of these medications in your body.
- If you are taking fluvoxamine, be careful with how much caffeine you have. Fluvoxamine causes the caffeine levels to be much higher than normal and to last longer in the body.
- Contact your doctor immediately if you become pregnant or intend to become pregnant.

This list is provided by Sunnybrook as a guideline to assist patients. Patients should always seek professional advice on the appropriate diet for their particular circumstances.

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