

**The Know Your Medicine brochure series includes:**

Cholesterol  
Depression  
Diabetes (Type 2)  
Heart Failure  
High Blood Pressure  
Osteoporosis

**The ElderCare Patient Education series includes:**

Aging and Your Response to Medicines  
Alcohol: Friend or Foe?  
The Caregiver's Guide to Using Medicine  
Choosing the Right Nonprescription Medicine  
The Consumer's Quick Reference to Using Medicines  
Eye Medicines: May Be More Than Meets the Eye  
Home Safety Issues  
How to Select Your Pharmacy and Pharmacist  
Medicines and Travel  
Personal Medicine Record  
Questions You May Have About Generic Medicines  
Vitamins Are Not Enough



The Peter Lamy Center  
for Drug Therapy and Aging  
University of Maryland School of Pharmacy

410-706-2434 (within Maryland)  
877-706-2434 (toll free outside Maryland)  
410-706-1488 (fax)  
[lamycenter@rx.umaryland.edu](mailto:lamycenter@rx.umaryland.edu)  
[www.pharmacy.umaryland.edu/~lamy](http://www.pharmacy.umaryland.edu/~lamy)

Produced by the University of Maryland Publications Office, 2000

# Know Your Medicines

## Depression



THE PETER LAMY CENTER  
for Drug Therapy and Aging  
THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

## Depression

Growing older comes with many hardships: lifestyle changes, medical conditions, and loss of loved ones. Trying as these are, depression is not a normal response to aging, disease, or living in a nursing home. It is a serious chronic illness. Successful treatment starts with recognizing and understanding your condition.

### What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Depression?

Depression occurs in episodes that last longer than two weeks. For those who have lost a loved one, depression is diagnosed when symptoms last more than two months. Each episode of depression increases the chance of having another.

#### Major Symptoms

- Depressed mood for long periods
- Decreased interest, or pleasure, in activities

## It Is Important to...

- Take your medicine exactly as directed by your doctor.
- Tell your doctor or pharmacist about side effects or improvements.
- Tell your doctor or pharmacist about any over-the-counter medicines and vitamins you are taking.
- Allow time for your medicine to work

*It could take 8 to 12 weeks for you to feel the full effect.*

*Treatment for first-time episodes could last 6 months, then be slowly discontinued.*

*Treatment for additional episodes may last years or be lifelong.*

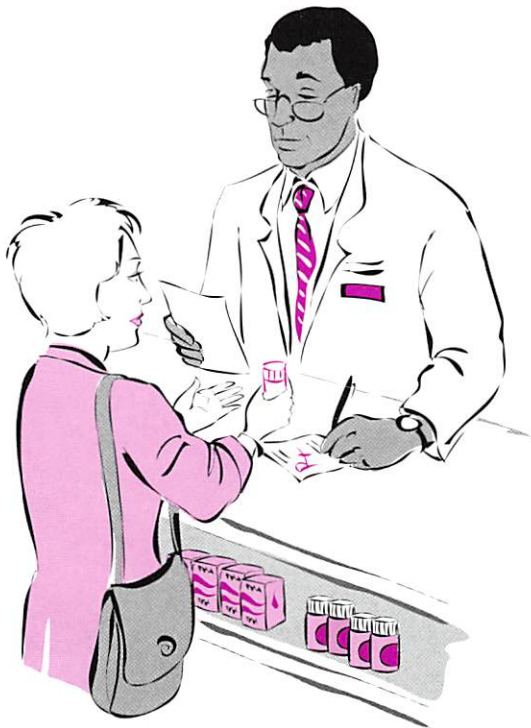
*You may notice side effects before feeling relief from depression.*

*If you have problems with side effects, contact your doctor or pharmacist before you make any change in your regimen.*

*Never stop taking a medicine without first talking to your doctor.*

## What If Medicines Don't Work?

Electroconvulsive therapy (once called “shock therapy”) is often effective for the severely depressed and for patients who do not respond to medicine. The procedure only takes a few minutes and is done under general anesthesia. It can cause memory problems, confusion, and, occasionally, irregular heart beats.



## Additional Symptoms

- Significant weight loss or gain
- Insomnia or excessive sleepiness
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Poor concentration
- Restlessness, difficulty sitting still
- Sluggishness, difficulty getting moving
- Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt
- Suicidal thoughts, plans, or attempts

As many as 20% of elderly people living at home and up to 37% of those in nursing homes have symptoms of depression. Sometimes, older adults don't mention a “depressed mood.” Instead they complain about headaches, stomach problems, inability to concentrate, low energy, or forgetfulness.





## Medical Illnesses Associated With Depression

Symptoms from other medical conditions sometimes overlap or obscure the symptoms of depression. Depression can even make the symptoms of other conditions worse.

Depression occurs in...

- half of people with Parkinson's disease, cancer or heart disease.
- 1 in 3 people who have had strokes.

Depression is also common in patients with...

*AIDS*

*Alzheimer's disease*

*anemias*

*chronic fatigue syndrome*

*chronic pain*

*congestive heart failure*

*coronary artery disease*

*diabetes mellitus*

*fibromyalgia*

*hypo or hyperthyroidism*

*malnutrition*

*multiple sclerosis*

*myocardial infarction*

*osteoarthritis*

*pneumonia*

*rheumatoid arthritis*

*tuberculosis*

Generic Name	Brand Name
venlafaxine	Effexor

### *Side Effects*

Nausea, dizziness, nervousness, constipation, tremor, sweating, and sexual dysfunction.

Should be used cautiously by people with high blood pressure and heart disease.



## Other Commonly Prescribed Antidepressants

Generic Name	Brand Name
trazodone	Desyrel
nefazodone	Serzone

### *Side Effects*

Trazodone can cause sedation and drops in blood pressure, both of which can cause falls and subsequent injury.

Nefazodone can cause sedation, dizziness, and constipation. If you are taking nefazodone, avoid drinking grapefruit juice.

Generic Name	Brand Name
bupropion	Wellbutrin

### *Side Effects*

Weight loss.

Should not be used by people with seizure disorders, a history of alcoholism, central nervous system tumors, head injuries, or strokes.

Generic Name	Brand Name
mirtazapine	Remeron

### *Side Effects*

Sedation, dizziness, dry mouth, constipation, and significant weight gain.

## Medicines Associated With Depression

Many types of medicine are associated with the symptoms of depression.

### **Antibiotics**

ampicillin  
ciprofloxacin  
enoxacin  
lomefloxacin  
metronidazole  
norfloxacin  
ofloxacin  
sulfonamides (Bactrim)  
tetracycline

### **Barbiturates**

phenobarbital  
primidone

### **Benzodiazepines**

clonazepam  
diazepam

### **Chemotherapy Medicines**

### **Corticosteroids**

dexamethasone  
prednisone

### **Gastrointestinal Medicines**

cimetidine

## Heart Medicines

beta-blockers (e.g., propranolol, metoprolol)

clonidine

digoxin

guanethidine

hydralazine

methyl dopa

reserpine, prazosin

## Hormones

hydrocortisone

estrogen

progesterone

## Pain Medicines/Analgesics

codeine

fentanyl

hydrocodone

ibuprofen

indomethacin

morphine

oxycodone

phenylbutazone

propoxyphene

## Anti-Parkinson's Medicines

levodopa/carbidopa

pergolide

selegiline

## Sleep Aids

chloral hydrate



## Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors (MAOIs)

Generic Name	Brand Name
phenelzine	Nardil
tranylcypromine	Parnate

### Side Effects

Anxiety, agitation, sedation, weight gain, swelling of the hands and feet, sexual problems, increased heart rate, and heart palpitations.

When taking these medicines you must avoid foods that contain tyramine. Tyramine isn't usually listed on food labels but is found in

- aged cheeses
- smoked meats
- red wines



## Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs)

Generic Name	Brand Name
fluoxetine	Prozac
fluvoxamine	Luvox
paroxetine	Paxil
sertraline	Zoloft
citalopram	Celexa

### *Side Effects*

Anxiety, insomnia, headaches, sexual problems, and stomach upset. Combining drugs that affect your serotonin levels can lead to “serotonin syndrome,” causing tremors, uncontrolled muscle movements, anxiety, agitation, confusion, fever, sweating, shivering, diarrhea, and abdominal pain.

### *Avoid taking*

- cough syrups that contain dextromethorphan
- St. John’s Wort
- diet pills

When your doctor determines that you no longer need these medicines, your dose should be gradually decreased over several weeks. If stopped abruptly, you may experience withdrawal effects, such as dizziness, nausea, sleepiness, vivid dreams, irritability, and feeling depressed again.

## Treatment can...

- ease symptoms
- reduce the risk of relapse
- improve quality of life

All treatments should begin with a caregiver educating the patient and family about the seriousness of depression.

Treatments for depression do not work quickly; they require patience.

## What Can I Do?

- Exercise
- Stay active
- Eat well-balanced meals

## Which Therapies Help?

For mild to moderate depression, many types of therapy increase self-esteem and social interaction.

- Individual or group therapy
- Music, art, or pet therapy



## Which Medicines Help?

Antidepressants work by increasing the amounts of neurotransmitters in the brain. These medicines are effective in about 70% of patients, and they are all equal in their ability to treat depression. Often, the dose must be gradually increased before you notice the full effect.

People who don't respond well to one type of medicine or experience too many side effects may need to try a different medicine. Sometimes a doctor will choose a medicine for its side effects, for example, choosing one that causes drowsiness for a person who has trouble sleeping.



Before prescribing medicine for depression, your doctor should make sure that...

- your other medical conditions are being properly treated.
- your current medicines aren't making your symptoms of depression worse.

### Tricyclic Antidepressants

Generic Name	Brand Name
amitriptyline	Elavil and Endep
imipramine	Tofranil
doxepin	Sinequan and Adapin
clomipramine	Anafranil
desipramine	Norpramin
nortriptyline	Aventyl and Pamelor
protriptyline	Vivactil
trimipramine	Surmontil

#### *Side Effects*

Dry mouth, constipation, blurred vision, confusion, disorientation, drowsiness, and effects on the heart (decrease in blood pressure, irregular heartbeats, increases in heart rate). Taking too much can cause serious injury or even death.

Should be used with caution by people with heart disease, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's dementia, glaucoma, enlarged prostate, and stroke.