

# How Medications Can Help Teenagers with Depression

## HOW MEDICATIONS

### CAN HELP

#### *Antidepressant Medications Are Often Used for Problems Such As:*

- **depression, sadness or irritability**
- **pain**
- **sleeping or changes in appetite**
- **fatigue or decreased energy**
- **difficulty concentrating or remembering**
- **loss of interest in activities that used to be enjoyable**
- **nervousness or tension**
- **anxiety attacks**

This pamphlet describes how using antidepressant medications can help you feel better and ready to make small changes that may improve the quality of your life.

## SOURCES OF HELP

Your primary care doctor can help you with medicines, and by supporting your efforts to make small lifestyle adjustments.

The following books are also good sources of information on depression:

*Feeling Good*, by David Burns.

*Control Your Depression*, by Peter Lewinsohn

*The Depression Helpbook* by Wayne Katon, Evette Ludman, and Gregory Simon.

### *Depression is a Serious but Common Illness*

Although depression can be truly disabling, it is also common. The good news is that it often improves with time and there are treatments that shorten its course.

Depression is often associated with life stresses or changes such as moving, parental problems, difficulties at school, or may be associated with medical problems such as chronic pain, chronic fatigue or chronic disease.

### **How Do Antidepressants Work?**

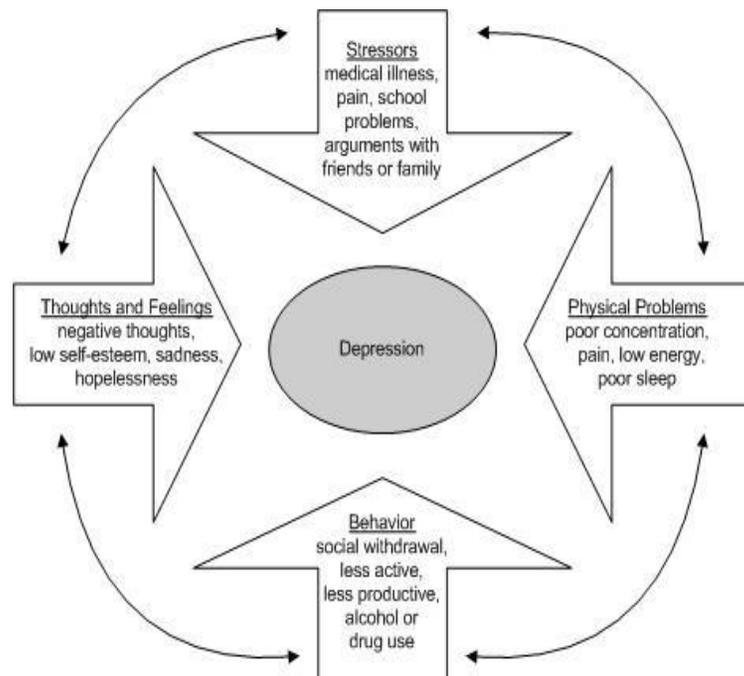
Both life stresses and medical problems may cause depletion in the amount of adrenaline-like chemicals in the nervous system. This chemical imbalance results in some of the common symptoms of depression such as sleep and appetite problems, loss of energy, loss of concentration, and chronic pain.

Antidepressant medications restore the normal balance of these chemicals, which helps to relieve some of these symptoms.

## THE CYCLE OF DEPRESSION

Depression is often thought of as a cycle involving thoughts, behavior and feelings, plus physical symptoms. Where one starts in this cycle depends on the individual. The encouraging news is that the cycle can be stopped, symptoms can be decreased and the depression treated.

### CYCLE OF DEPRESSION DIAGRAM



## SOME COMMON SIDE-EFFECTS, AND WHAT YOU CAN DO UNTIL THEY DISAPPEAR:

<u>Side-effect:</u>	<u>Solution:</u> (Remember, most side effects last less than 1 week).
Upset Stomach	Remind yourself that this will be a temporary difficulty.
Constipation:	Eat more fiber-rich foods, drink plenty of fluids.
Drowsiness:	Get fresh air and take frequent walks. Try taking your medicines at night.
Wakefulness:	Take medications early in the day. Learn more about good sleep practices. Take a hot bath and have a light snack before bed. Do not take naps during the day.
Blurred Vision:	Remind yourself that this will be a temporary difficulty.
Dizziness:	Get up slower, drink plenty of fluids. If you are worried, call your doctor.
Feeling Hyper:	You can expect this to improve within three to five days. If not, call your doctor or nurse.

### *Do antidepressants have side-effects?*

1. Some people may have reactions to their medicines and experience symptoms such as those listed on the following page. Such side-effects are usually temporary and can be relieved by following the solutions suggested or by a change in medication. If you have an unusual reaction to your medication, or if you are concerned about taking medicines, call your doctor.
2. Side effects usually occur in the first 1 to 2 weeks of treatment and disappear within a month. If you have any symptom that is troublesome, **do not stop the medication**, but call your doctor.

### *What should I do if I experience side-effects?*

1. **Try to persist** and tell yourself that these are temporary difficulties. Most of the side-effects will decrease within a few days. Once your body gets used to the medicines you will begin to feel better.
2. **Try the remedies** outlined on the following page. If these remedies don't work, **consult your doctor or nurse**.

You may notice that each day the side-effects decrease more. Most people have no trouble adjusting to these minor problems, and many people don't complain of any side effects after a few weeks.

### *A Personal Example:*

When John started 10<sup>th</sup> grade his classes got harder and he was spending all of his extra time doing homework. He had less time for his family and friends or doing the activities that he used to enjoy, such as playing basketball. He slept less and began to feel more tired and irritable. He developed frequent headaches, slept poorly at night and had difficulty concentrating during the day.

His doctor prescribed an antidepressant medication which helped him sleep better. Feeling more rested, John was able to concentrate better. He began to realize how much stress was related to his symptoms. He decided to get some help from a school counselor and changed one of his difficult classes to a study hall. He used the extra time in the evenings to play basketball with his friends and be with his family.



Antidepressant medications can help with pain, fatigue, energy and sleep. When you are feeling more rested and energetic, it is easier to do things you enjoy and to work on routine tasks. When you engage in pleasant activities and do things that give you a sense of accomplishment, you think more positively about yourself and your future. The following list provides an example of other symptoms associated with moving "down" or "up" in the depression cycle

## ... AND WHAT YOU CAN DO

### THE DOWNWARD CYCLE

<b>Physical symptoms:</b>	Feeling tired, in pain, unable to concentrate.
<b>Emotional symptoms:</b>	Feeling down, discouraged, less hopeful.
<b>Thoughts:</b>	“No one wants to see me.” “I’m not doing a good job.” “I’ll let them down.”
<b>Behaviors:</b>	Avoid contact with friends. Stop doing the activities that you used to enjoy.

1. It is important to start your medicines as soon as they are prescribed. Do not wait until after a holiday or a time when you think you’ll feel better. If you have any worries about starting your medicines, call your doctor or nurse.
2. Some people worry that they are taking too many pills. You will usually start with a low dose pill and may have to take many pills per day within a week or so to build up the dose. Each pill is a small dose and thus adds up to a safe and proper dose. Some doctors may have you return within two weeks for pills that are larger in dosage, which then allows you to take fewer tablets.
3. Make taking your medicine a part of your daily routine, like brushing your teeth. It helps to take them at the same time every day. Ask someone in your house to help you remember, or leave yourself a note. If you’re not sure what to do, phone your doctor or nurse and ask them to explain when you should take your tablets, how many tablets to take each day and when to come back for a follow-up visit.
4. It may take 3 to 6 weeks until the medicine takes its full effect. Patience is very important.
5. To get the maximum benefit it is important to take the medicines for at least 6 months, even if you start to feel better. Your body needs time to stabilize. If you stop too soon, you may begin to feel worse again. Talk with your doctor before you stop the medications.

## SOME COMMON PROBLEMS...

1. Some people put off starting their medicines.
2. Some people are reluctant to increase the dose of their medicines for various reasons.
3. Some people forget to take their medicines regularly.
4. Some people give up on medicine too early. They stop taking their medicines because they don't feel any better.
5. Some people don't continue to take medicines that are working for long enough. They stop taking their medicines because they start to feel better.

## THE UPWARD CYCLE

### **Physical symptoms:**

Sleeping better, more energetic, less aware of pain, more able to focus.

### **Emotional symptoms:**

Feeling "up," more caring toward yourself, optimistic.

### **Thoughts:**

"I'm doing just fine."  
"I can try this"

### **Behaviors:**

Spending time with friends. Going out and doing something fun like seeing a movie or playing sports or trying new activities

## COMMON QUESTIONS ASKED ABOUT ANTIDEPRESSANTS

Some people are concerned about taking any medication. Antidepressant medications have been shown to be safe and effective in treating symptoms of depression. However, some people have difficulty staying on the medicines or taking them as prescribed. Knowing how these medicines work and what to expect over the first few weeks often helps people decide if medicines are right for them and if they will be able to take the medicines regularly. The following information may help you decide what will work best for you.

If you are worried that these medications might interact with other medicines you are taking, discuss this with your doctor.

### **How should I take the medicine?**

Some people find it easier to take the medicine in one dose at the same time every day. Others divide up the pills to take throughout the day.

Some people find that they experience some sleepiness with antidepressants when they take them early in the day. If this happens to you, it may be helpful to take these pills in the evening or before bedtime. In this way, they can help you sleep well all night.

Some people find that antidepressants give them more energy. If this happens to you, you should take your medicines in the morning to increase your energy when you need it during the day and to help you sleep better at night.

### **Can I carry on my usual activities while taking this medicine?**

**YES.** When first beginning, the medicine or when the dose is increased, some people become more sleepy. If this happens, be careful while driving or when doing any other activities where it would be dangerous for you to fall asleep. In most cases, this wears off after two to three days, and you can go back to your regular schedule of activities. Should you continue to be sleepy after 1 week, you may need to change to a different medicine. Call your doctor if this is a problem for you.

### **Can I take other medications along with my antidepressant pills?**

**YES,** after you discuss with your doctor what other medicines you are taking. Remember, if you experience problematic side-effects, call your doctor.

### **Can I drink alcohol while I am on these medicines?**

**NO.** It is best to avoid alcohol while on antidepressant medicines.