

# Managing Depression: Medications

Untreated depression can be very challenging. The good news is that, with the right combination of medication and therapy, most people with depression can get relief from their symptoms.

*“When I take my medication and really put an effort into doing some of those things I know work then I can start to see some of the sun shine through again.”*

Sarah Reed has been living with depression since she was little. This serious mental health condition is different than simple sadness. And it affects everyone differently, so there is no “one-size-fits-all” prescription for treating it.

*“I tried four or five different antidepressants as a teenager before I found one that really worked.”*

*“Working closely with your psychiatric team will help you find the right medication and it might not happen the first time, you may have to take a few medication trials to get the medication that helps.”*

*“So if you find yourself sleeping all the time, crying all the time, just feeling really bad about yourself... It's time to reach out and try to get some help.”*

Claudine Jackson lives with depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder brought on by being abused as a child.

Patience helped her through the trial-and-error process of working with her therapist to find the right medications.

*“They have to kind of watch you and see what your mood is. And you have to give them feedback for them to find the right combination.”*

There are several different types of anti-depressants. These medications alter the chemicals in the brain that control your mood, making you feel less depressed.

SSRIs, or Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, are the most common anti-depressants. They target the brain chemical serotonin, which helps you experience feelings of happiness or pleasure.

*“When you're depressed it's low and sometimes by using these medications that increase serotonin, we're able to get someone to feel better and relieve some of the symptoms of depression.”*

There are also what's called SNRIs, or Serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors.

*“Norepinephrine is another neurochemical ... that has powerful effects on brain function specifically with respect to anxiety.”*

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*“And what those medicines tend to do is boost our energy and relieve our depression.”*

Tricyclic antidepressants are older medications that are sometimes used. But they tend to cause more side effects than newer medications so they usually are not prescribed unless an SSRI just doesn't seem to work.

No matter what type of anti-depressant you are prescribed, it's important to take it as directed and track your symptoms. But be patient. The effects are not felt overnight.

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*“In most cases, it takes weeks to months for full antidepressant effect.”*

Antidepressants can have side effects. These might include nausea, weight gain and changes to your sleep schedule. They can also cause sexual side effects.

If your medication isn't working, your health care team can change your doses or prescribe something else, like ketamine or esketamine.

These medications can work quickly and help relieve symptoms of depression, including thoughts of suicide.

If you are prescribed ketamine or esketamine your healthcare provider will work closely with you to monitor the effects.

*“It was kind of trial and error for a long time.”*

Michelle Wojcik lives with depression and borderline personality disorder.

*“I've actually been on the same regimen of medications now for at least three years with just various tinkering as symptoms kind of come up and go and ups and downs and that kind of stuff.”*

If Michelle forgets to take her medication, the symptoms that return first are isolation and the desire to self-harm by cutting herself. It's something she's struggled with for years.

*“If I missed a day of medications, I can start feeling the changes right away.”*

It's important to talk to your therapist about how the medication is making you feel. For people with mental illness, taking medication is just a part of everyday life...

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*“I’m going to be on medications for the rest of my life. It’s no different than somebody who needs to take insulin for the rest of their life for diabetes.”*

If you have questions or concerns about medication to treat your depression, talk to your mental health provider.