

KINDRED

63 Victoria Street Tel: 292 3456
Hamilton HM 12 kindredbda@gmail.com

Kindred Antidepressant Information Factsheet

1. What are antidepressants?

Antidepressants are safe and effective medications for a number of mental health problems including mood and anxiety disorders. Antidepressants work by increasing the levels of certain neurotransmitters in your brain leading to downstream changes in gene expression, neurotrophic factor synthesis and neurogenesis. Antidepressants start working immediately but can take 2-6 weeks for the necessary downstream changes to occur. You should expect to take antidepressants for at least 6-12 months after your symptoms are gone which reduces your risk of future relapse.

2. Are there any side effects?

The modern antidepressants have much fewer side effects than the older ones and are, generally, very well tolerated. Headache and gastrointestinal disturbance are common, but transient, side effects after first starting antidepressants. Antidepressants can affect sleep: if daytime sleepiness is experienced then the medication should be taken at bedtime; if insomnia is experienced then they should be taken in the morning. Sexual dysfunction can occur, see (7) below; if you get these symptoms then discuss with your psychiatrist. Please read the patient information leaflet that is included with your medication. This leaflet lists all the possible side effects including rare ones. Rare, but potentially serious, side effects include Serotonin Syndrome and the emergence of suicidal ideation. Serotonin Syndrome consists of high body temperature, agitation, tremor, sweating, and diarrhea. It can occur when antidepressants are combined with other medications including other antidepressants, stimulants and some painkillers. If this occurs then the medications need to be stopped immediately. Antidepressants can be associated with the activation of suicidal ideas. If you experience these rare, but potentially serious, side effects then contact your psychiatrist or the emergency services.

3. What if I want to stop taking antidepressants?

Antidepressants are not addictive but your body will, inevitably, have become used to them over time. If you stop taking them suddenly then you may experience withdrawal symptoms such as flu-like symptoms, light-headedness, unsteadiness, electric-shock-like sensations and headache. Please talk to your psychiatrist before stopping your medication. When the time is right, you can wean off them slowly in order to minimise any potential withdrawal effects.

4. Do antidepressants affect other medications?

There can sometimes be drug interactions between antidepressants and some other medications. This includes over the counter medication and herbal or complementary medicines such as St John's Wort. You should discuss with your doctor or pharmacist about any potential interactions with other medications.

5. Can I drink alcohol while taking antidepressants?

Drinking alcohol while taking antidepressants carries a number of risks. Alcohol is a poison that can be abused for its intoxicating properties and result in addiction and health problems. It can also make depression worse and promote suicidal behaviour. It is reported that alcohol and antidepressants combined can, rarely, result in pathological intoxication when the individual becomes much more intoxicated than expected and can exhibit reckless behaviour for which their memory is impaired.

6. Can I drive when taking antidepressants?

Some medications can affect your ability to drive. If your medication makes you feel drowsy, light-headed or uncoordinated then you should not drive.

7. Can antidepressants affect my sex life?

Antidepressants can sometimes have unacceptable side effects that impact sexual performance including: reduced sex drive, problems with getting an

erection, difficulty ejaculating or having an orgasm and poor vaginal lubrication. These side effects are reversible. If you are having these problems, inform your psychiatrist so that alternative treatment options can be explored.

8. Pregnancy.

While taking any medication, it is important to use contraception to avoid unplanned pregnancies. Whether or not to continue antidepressants during conception and pregnancy is an individual decision based upon an informed risk/benefit analysis. Although there is a slightly increased rate of foetal abnormalities (5% vs 3% in the general population), antidepressants are generally safe to take during pregnancy. Discuss with your doctor if you are pregnant, or plan on getting pregnant.

9. Breast feeding.

Small amounts of antidepressants can pass into breast milk. Talk to your doctor or midwife about the risks and benefits of breastfeeding. Some antidepressants are more preferable than others.