

Treating Depression: Should You Consider An Antidepressant?

What are antidepressants?

Antidepressants are drugs used to treat the symptoms of depression.

Do I need an antidepressant?

You probably do not need to take an antidepressant if your “blues” are mild, or they are caused by a stressful event in your life. That could be divorce, illness, job loss, or death of a friend or family member.

But, you may need an antidepressant if your low feelings last longer than two weeks, you are having trouble managing everyday life, and you have five or more of the symptoms listed in the box below. You may also want to try counseling or talk therapy (psychotherapy).

Symptoms of Depression

- Eating too much or not enough
- Feeling down, unhappy, or hopeless
- Feeling nervous, impatient, restless, or angry
- Feeling overwhelmed and stressed
- Feeling tired or slowed down
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Having stomachaches or headaches that don't get better with treatment
- Having no interest in sex
- Not being able to focus, remember things, or make decisions
- Not sleeping, waking too early, or oversleeping
- Not wanting to do things you usually enjoy, like hobbies or work
- Thinking about suicide

Antidepressants help relieve symptoms for more than half of people who try them. However, you may need to try two or three antidepressants, or a higher or lower dose, to find what works best for you.

Antidepressants can have side effects.

Most people who take antidepressants have side effects. Each antidepressant causes different side effects in different people. Which antidepressant works best for you may depend on the side effects.

Side effects that can be dangerous include:

- Confusion, nervousness, panic, or dread
- Drowsiness or sleepiness
- Loss of sex drive
- Thoughts of suicide
- Weight gain

Milder side effects that usually go away include:

- Dizziness or headaches
- Dry mouth, sweating, or the shakes
- Nausea or diarrhea

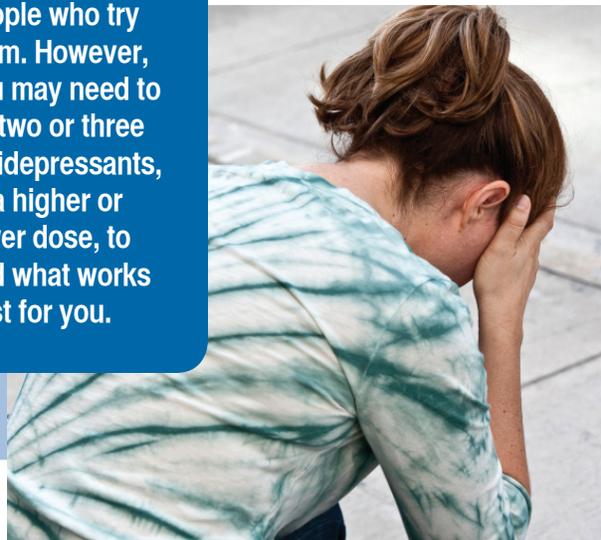
Our advice:

If you and your doctor decide that you should try an antidepressant, start with the lowest dose. This may help prevent side effects. If a drug does not help in six to eight weeks, talk with your doctor about taking a higher dose or trying another drug.

We compared 12 antidepressants to determine how well they work to treat depression, how safe they are, and how

much they cost. We chose these five as *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*. All are available as generics.

-  **Bupropion**
-  **Citalopram**
-  **Fluoxetine**
-  **Paroxetine**
-  **Sertraline**



Drugs to Treat Depression

Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs are in blue. We recommend these drugs because they work as well and are as safe as the other drugs, and they cost less. The dollar symbol **\$** means the dose of that drug may be available for a low monthly cost through programs offered by large chain stores, like Costco, CVS, Kmart, Kroger, Sam's Club, Target, Walmart, and Walgreens. Some of these stores have restrictions or charge a membership fee, however.

Our analysis is based on a scientific review by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. This is a summary of a longer, more detailed report you can find at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org.

Best Buy	Generic Name & Strength	Brand Name	Pills per Day	Average Cost per Month
	Bupropion tablet 75 mg	Generic	Three	\$53
	Citalopram tablet 10 mg	Celexa	One	\$127
	Citalopram tablet 10 mg	Generic	One	\$33 \$
	Duloxetine capsule 20 mg	Cymbalta	One	\$166
	Escitalopram tablet 5 mg	Lexapro	One	\$125
	Fluoxetine capsule 10 mg	Prozac	One	\$227
	Fluoxetine capsule 10 mg	Generic	One	\$22 \$
	Paroxetine tablet 10 mg	Paxil	One	\$142
	Paroxetine tablet 10 mg	Generic	One	\$20 \$
	Sertraline tablet 25 mg	Zoloft	One	\$152
	Sertraline tablet 25 mg	Generic	One	\$29 \$
	Venlafaxine tablet 25 mg	Generic	Two	\$96
	Venlafaxine tablet 37.5 mg	Effexor	Two	\$172

Prices are based on nationwide retail average prices for January 2011. *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* obtained prices from data provided by Wolters Kluwer Pharma Solutions, which is not involved in our analysis or recommendations.