

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) Parent Information

SSRIs, a commonly prescribed type of antidepressant, can help your child overcome depression and/or anxiety. Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are the most commonly prescribed type of antidepressants for children.

How SSRIs work

SSRIs ease symptoms by increasing levels of serotonin in the brain. Serotonin is one of the chemical messengers (neurotransmitters) that carry signals between brain cells. SSRIs block the reabsorption (reuptake) of serotonin in the brain, making more serotonin available. SSRIs are called selective because they seem to primarily affect serotonin, not other neurotransmitters.

Possible side effects and cautions

All SSRIs work in a similar way and generally can cause similar side effects, though some people may not experience any. Most side effects may go away after the first few weeks of treatment, while others may lead us to try a different drug. If your child can't tolerate one SSRI, they may be able to tolerate a different one, as SSRIs differ in chemical makeup.

Possible side effects of SSRIs may include:

- Changes in sleep- may be either drowsiness or trouble sleeping
- GI symptoms such as nausea, stomach aches, diarrhea, or constipation
- Dry mouth, sweating, flushing, flu like symptoms
- Sexual problems
- Headache
- Easy bruising or bleeding (especially if taking long term NSAIDs)

Taking medication with food or at bedtime may reduce the risk of nausea. To counteract drowsiness, take the medication at bedtime. To counteract insomnia, give the medication in the morning.

In some children SSRIs can cause more intense symptoms of agitation, aggression, restlessness, irritability, hostility, disinhibition, and emotional lability. If your child has these symptoms, **stop the medication and make an appointment with your primary doctor** to discuss your concerns. Rarely, SSRIs can cause high levels of serotonin to accumulate- leading to serotonin syndrome. Signs and symptoms of serotonin syndrome include anxiety, agitation, sweating, confusion, tremors, restlessness, lack of coordination and a rapid heart rate. Seek immediate medical attention if you have any of these signs or symptoms.

Suicide risk and antidepressants

Antidepressants are generally safe, but the FDA requires that all antidepressants carry black box warnings, the strictest warnings for prescriptions. Some children, teenagers and young adults under 25 may have an increase in suicidal thoughts or behavior when taking antidepressants, especially in the first few weeks after starting or when the dose is changed.

Anyone taking an antidepressant should be watched closely for worsening depression or unusual behavior. If your child has suicidal thoughts when taking an antidepressant, immediately contact us or take your child to the emergency room.

Keep in mind that antidepressants are more likely to reduce suicide risk in the long run by improving mood.

Stopping treatment with SSRIs

Not all children need to continue treatment with SSRIs indefinitely. SSRIs are not considered addictive. However, stopping antidepressant treatment abruptly or missing several doses can cause withdrawal-like symptoms. Work with us to gradually and safely decrease your child's dose.

Withdrawal-like symptoms can include:

- General feeling of uneasiness
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Lethargy
- Flu-like symptoms

Finding the right antidepressant

People may react differently to the same antidepressant. For example, a particular drug may work better — or not as well — for your child than for another person. Or your child may have more, or fewer, side effects from taking a specific antidepressant than someone else does.

Typically, it may take several weeks or longer before an antidepressant is fully effective and for initial side effects to ease up.

Medication refills and Follow Up

Children being treated for depression and anxiety require close monitoring. To avoid medical error, it is important that the physician treating your child is the one refilling your medication. We request that **2 business days notice be given for all medication refills** in order to facilitate this. Additionally, your pharmacy may not keep the medication in stock and need 24-48hrs to order it.

Consistent follow up is necessary to make sure your child's symptoms are addressed effectively and safely. Visits may be frequent as the dose of medication is being adjusted. When scheduling these appointments, please specify with the front desk that the follow up is for depression or anxiety so that the appropriate amount of time is designated on the physician's schedule.