RELEASE
Redressing long-term antidepressant use

The University Of Queensland
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Decision Aid

Is stopping antidepressants right for me?

You may be considering stopping your antidepressant. Use this Decision Aid to help you decide and to discuss with your doctor.

Depression is not a long-term condition caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain that can be corrected by medication. Long-term use of antidepressants (longer than 12-months) is not recommended for most people. There is a lack of evidence showing benefit with long-term use, but there is evidence of adverse effects and risks with long-term use including diabetes, weight gain, sexual dysfunction, and falls.

Antidepressant withdrawal symptoms are common and can be severe. Slowly decreasing antidepressant dose can help to minimise withdrawal symptoms

1. Comparing my options

Stop taking antidepressants	Continue taking antidepressants
What is involved? Slowly reducing and stopping antidepressants.	**What is involved?** Keep taking antidepressants. You can stop sometime in the future.
What are the benefits of stopping? Avoid antidepressant adverse-effects and risks. Your energy levels, motivation, sexual functioning, and weight control may improve, and you may regain the ability to feel your emotions again including joy and excitement. Avoid the risks associated with long-term antidepressant use such as increased risk of falls. Avoid having to take a pill every day.	**What are the benefits of continuing?** Avoid antidepressant withdrawal symptoms. Antidepressant withdrawal symptoms are common and can be severe, although slow tapering of drug dose can help to minimise withdrawal symptoms, and symptoms will lessen over time. Minimise risk of 'relapse'. However, you could develop strategies to cope with distress and low mood without medication.
What are the downsides? You may experience antidepressant withdrawal symptoms which are common and can be severe. Symptoms can include anxiety, dizziness, crying, irritability, nausea, 'brain zaps', incoordination, difficulty concentrating, headache, sleep disturbance, and tremor. Slow tapering of drug dose can help to minimise withdrawal symptoms enabling you to successfully stop antidepressants. You may feel your emotions again, including symptoms of depression or anxiety. It is important to know that you can develop strategies to cope with distress and low mood.	**What are the downsides of long-term use?** Antidepressant adverse-effects and risks, including emotional numbing, low sex drive and difficulty reaching orgasm, weight gain, tiredness and lack of motivation, increased risk of falls in older age. There is also the risk of worsening mood symptoms while on antidepressants.

RACGP Accepted clinical resource

For supporting evidence and further information please visit
www.releasetoolkit.com.au

2. Deciding what's right for me

Your feelings are important. In deciding whether to stop or keep taking antidepressants, think about what matters to you. Tick the box that best represents where you are on the scale:

Reasons to stop taking	Reasons to keep taking
I want to live free of antidepressants	I don't mind taking antidepressants
I want to feel emotions again, highs and lows	I would rather not feel the ups and downs
I want my sex life back	Sex is not an issue for me
I want to see if stopping helps me lose weight	Weight is not an issue for me
Antidepressants are not helping me	Antidepressants are helping me
I have strategies that help me manage distress and depressive symptoms	I am afraid of relapse and don't want to risk depressive symptoms
I can manage withdrawal symptoms through slow tapering and other strategies	I am afraid of withdrawal symptoms and don't want to risk withdrawal symptoms
I now understand that depression is not a long-term condition caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain that antidepressants can correct	I am not concerned whether or not antidepressants correct any chemical imbalance
My other important reasons/life circumstances:	

You can show and discuss your answers with your doctor and/or friends and family to help with your decision whether to continue or stop antidepressants. It is not a failure if you are not ready to stop. This decision aid may be useful if your circumstances change in the future.

3. Next Steps

Schedule an appointment to see your doctor to review and discuss your antidepressant medication. Take this Decision Aid with you to your appointment. Your doctor can discuss with you how to safely taper and stop antidepressants, if this is what you decide.

Jot down in this box any concerns or questions for your doctor.

RELEASE research project

Research Leads: Professor Katharine Wallis, Associate Professor Maria Donald

Ethical approval: The University of Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee (2022/HE001667)

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