

When to stop

When you want to stop

The time to stop taking an antidepressant maybe whenever you decide that you want to stop. This may be when you realise that:

- You no longer need an antidepressant.
 - Perhaps the original precipitating stressor has resolved and there is no clinical indication for continued use.
 - Or perhaps you now know that depression is not caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain or serotonin deficiency, and antidepressants do not work by correcting any chemical imbalance.
- You want to live your life free of relying on medication.
- The antidepressant is not working. Perhaps you are not feeling any better despite taking an antidepressant.
- You are experiencing adverse effects. For example,
 - You might be feeling emotionally numb, unable to feel either the lows or the highs of life (joy, love, excitement), or detached and not able to feel connected with or care for others.
 - You might be experiencing sexual problems including low sex drive and difficulty reaching orgasm.
 - You might be feeling lethargic or tired all the time and lacking in motivation.
 - You might feel dulled or brain fog, lacking in mental clarity.
 - You might have gained weight since starting an antidepressant.
 - You might be developing physical dependence, such that you experience withdrawal effects if you miss a dose, for example when you go away for a weekend and forget your pills. The longer you keep taking antidepressants, the more likely you will experience withdrawal effects and the harder it will be to stop.
- Or there may be other reasons that you wish to stop such as you are planning a pregnancy, or you want to save on doctor and prescription fees.

When your doctor suggests stopping

After considering your mental health and medication history, your doctor might initiate a discussion about stopping antidepressants. This might be when:

- The recommended duration of antidepressant therapy is complete. Most clinical guidelines recommend around 6 – 12 months therapy.
- The risks of continuing antidepressants outweigh the chance of benefit. The risks increase with increasing age, for example risk of falls and fracture. There is also an increased risk of diabetes with ongoing therapy, and increased risk of drug interactions with increasing numbers of medications.

A decision aid that sets out the potential benefits and harms of both stopping or continuing an antidepressant might help you to make an informed choice about whether now is the time for you to attempt to stop taking an antidepressant.



A decision aid is available via the RELEASE toolkit website: www.releasetoolkit.com.au