

Medication ^[1]

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Medication is available to help ease anxiety symptoms. Depending on the severity and duration of an anxiety disorder, doctors and psychiatrists may recommend taking medication in combination with certain forms of therapy for the best possible results.

For people contending with mild to severe forms of anxiety disorders, general anxiety-reduction tips and therapy are great, research-backed starts ^[3] on their road to recovery. When combined with specific medications designed to further help reduce anxiety symptoms, this two-pronged approach can also be highly ^[4] effective ^[5].

It is worth noting that for most individuals with anxiety, medication is not needed nor helpful for a successful treatment. Some medications frequently used for anxiety disorders, such as Sobril, Valium, Xanax and other benzodiazepines/tranquilizers, usually **reduce** the effect of other treatments and often trigger **more** anxiety in the long run. These medications are also frequently known for high potential of substance abuse, and although it reduces anxiety fast, it often also induce anxiety afterwards, which may lead to a vicious cycle.

You may be curious about what exactly medication does to help people with anxiety. This section outlines the basics of how antidepressants and other psychopharmaceuticals work. Remember, however, that if you or someone you know is considering starting medicinal treatment for an anxiety condition, be sure to consult with a medical and mental health professional first. **Medication treatments require time, commitment, and involve their own set of positives and negatives.** Please seek professional diagnoses and opinions before beginning an anxiety-reduction program that involves medication.

Medication & Treatment

SSRIs

Antianxiety and antidepressant medications have been in use for a number of decades. The most commonly prescribed drugs for people with anxiety and depression are a class called Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs). Brands you may have heard of include ^[6]

- Citalopram (Celexa)
- Escitalopram (Lexapro)
- Fluoxetine (Prozac)
- Paroxetine (Paxil, Pexeva)
- Sertraline (Zoloft)

Serotonin is a naturally occurring chemical in the brain (a neurotransmitter ^[7]) which helps

regulate positive mood states. The chemical "fires" between neuron cells in the brain, where its effects are felt, before being absorbed by the receiving neuron cell.

SSRIs work under the assumption and evidence that people with depression and anxiety are unable to reabsorb (reuptake) a significant amount of serotonin, resulting in lowered mood or more anxious states of mind. SSRIs block the reuptake of serotonin between neurons in an effort to enhance and lengthen the amount of time serotonin affects your mood.

When SSRIs Work

While the classic explanation for this process and why it works is "an imbalance of serotonin in the brain," science is discovering that anxiety and depression are more complex than a simple imbalance [8]. For some people, medication at clinical doses (50mg to 200mg) can have tremendous positive effects on mood. Others may experience no change, heightened arousal/depression/anxiety, or even **anhedonia** (loss of interest in once-loved things). There is no baseline "perfect level" of neurotransmitters in the brain averaged across all of humanity; think of this explanation as a metaphorical shorthand.

Thought the ultimate functional reasons SSRIs work for some people and not others is still under debate [9], people suffering from severe symptoms of depression and/or anxiety may benefit from a medication intervention. It is preferable to use medication in conjunction with therapy [5], as medication without therapy is far less effective than a combined approach. (**Note: Medication does not "cure" anxiety and depression, but makes symptoms more manageable.**) Furthermore, antidepressants require daily usage between 4 to 6 weeks before most people experience their effects.

It may take months or years of different dosages, brands, and therapeutic combinations to find the right balance for your anxiety and/or depression. If you experience relief with medication, and are dedicated enough to find this balance, you can join millions of other people have found relief through continued use of SSRIs.

As with any psychopharmaceutical, there are risks [10] to taking medication [11]. SSRIs, because of their duration and daily intake, cannot be discontinued all at once. Tapering is recommended for extended use to avoid withdrawal symptoms [12] (mood shifts, elevated anxiety, physical effects). This information is not presented to deter you from seeking antidepressants to help your condition, only to remind you that antidepressant use is a long-term process [6]. When you are ready to change or come off/reduce your dosage, the process is also gradual.

Medication by Disorder

The nuances of research for medication use with specific anxiety/depressive disorders is too extensive for this course. The more you know about the positive and negative sides of medication use, the more informed your decisions will be and the greater security you and your doctor/psychiatrist will feel as you continue exploring treatment options.

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[3] http://www.cpa.ca/docs/File/Practice/TheEfficacyAndEffectivenessOfPsychologicalTreatments_web.pdf

[4] <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25142196>

- [5] <http://archpsyc.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1897300>
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