

# Antidepressants: do they work?

## What are antidepressants?

Antidepressants are a type of medication commonly used to treat depression or prevent it recurring.

They act by increasing the levels of neurotransmitters such as, serotonin and noradrenaline in the brain. This process is not fully understood and research in the field is ongoing.

## But do they work?

Overall the message from the latest data is that they do work.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists estimates that in the treatment of depression: 50-65% of people started on an antidepressant will see an improvement, versus 25-30% of people taking inactive 'dummy' pills called a placebo. This indicates that the majority of people do benefit from antidepressants, even if it is sometimes due to a placebo effect.

At around two months 60% of people on antidepressants report a 50% reduction in their symptoms, improved mood, better sleep and so on. Antidepressants have been shown to be most effective when used to quickly relieve the symptoms of severe depression. In cases of mild depression they may not be as effective as previously thought.

## What to know before starting an antidepressant

When first prescribed an antidepressant you will be started on the lowest dose thought necessary to improve your symptoms.

Antidepressants usually start to take effect after seven to 14 days. If you experience mild side effects, it is important not to stop taking your new medication as often the side effects will only last for the first couple of weeks.

Normally a trial of four to six weeks is advised before the medication is reviewed by your doctor. At this point if you do not feel any benefit they may recommend increasing your dose, or trialling an alternative medication. Everyone is different and some medications work better for some people.

A course of treatment usually lasts six months, although longer courses may be indicated.

Antidepressants treat the symptoms of depression, however do not always address its causes. To treat severe depression they are usually used in combination with other therapies.

## What other options are there?

Antidepressants work well for a lot of people, but other treatments are available such as group therapy, counselling and cognitive behaviour therapy.

*Find us online at [cornwallft](http://cornwallft)*



You may also find support through self-help groups, exercise and mindfulness.

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is the most frequently recommended psychotherapy and is often used in combination with antidepressants.

CBT is a talking therapy that teaches you coping skills to deal with problematic thinking styles and behaviour patterns that are affecting your mood. It is used for mild to moderate depression and has similar success rates to antidepressants.

## More information on antidepressants

Links to further information online from:

**Choice and Medication**  
[www.choiceandmedication.org/cornwall](http://www.choiceandmedication.org/cornwall)

**NHS Choices**  
[www.nhs.uk/conditions/antidepressants/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/antidepressants/)

[www.nhs.uk/news/medication/big-new-study-confirms-antidepressants-work-better-placebo/#conclusion](http://www.nhs.uk/news/medication/big-new-study-confirms-antidepressants-work-better-placebo/#conclusion)

## Useful contacts

### NHS Choices

Whatever you need to know about coping with stress, anxiety or depression, or just the normal emotional ups and downs of life, the NHS Choices Moodzone is here to help.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/#self-help-and-treatments>

### Mind

A good source of information about different mental illnesses, including depression.

Web: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

### Samaritans

Confidential emotional support service available 365 days a year, 24 hours a day.

T: **116 123**

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

Web: [www.samaritans.org/](http://www.samaritans.org/)

### Outlook SW

Psychological therapy services for people aged 16 and above in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Web: [www.outlooksw.co.uk/](http://www.outlooksw.co.uk/)