

Withdrawing from Antidepressants

Before you start your withdrawal it is advisable that if you are taking any benzodiazepines or Z – drugs that you start to reduce those medications first. If you are just coming off antidepressants there is usually no need to switch them to a different type.

Withdrawing safely from medication

The slower the time you take to reduce and the smaller the cuts you make, the milder the withdrawal symptoms. Reductions should ideally be every 4-6 weeks starting at 10% of your total dose.

The smaller the cuts you make, the less the shock to your system, and the less pronounced the withdrawal symptoms triggered by the cut. It is not recommended that any individual cut represent more than 10% to 20% of your total dose at a given time. It is preferable to make smaller and smaller cuts as you go and this can be very difficult as you approach the end of your reduction programme. However you should avoid reducing at the end by miniscule amounts as this can prolong the withdrawal and sustain dependence.

Never abruptly stop any antidepressant - cold turkey is the largest cut of all and the shock caused by such an abrupt withdrawal is so severe that even after resumption of your drug at the previous dose, it may take weeks or months to "stabilise", and in some cases, you may never stabilise from a cold turkey withdrawal until after you have completed your reduction.

The time it will take you to come off your medication varies. It is dependent on type and dose of medication and the length of time you have been taking it. Other factors will include body chemistry – every ones symptoms and severity or symptoms may be slightly different. To generalize it can take from a few months to a few years depending on circumstances.

Symptoms of Antidepressant withdrawal

The symptoms reported on withdrawal of SSRI's and SNRI's:

Psychological Symptoms:

Anxiety

Agitation

Crying Spells

Irritability

Overactivity

Aggression

Depersonalisation

Decreased concentration

Confusion

Memory problems

Low mood

Physical Symptoms:

Disequilibrium:

dizziness

light headedness

vertigo

ataxia

Gastrointestinal:

anorexia

nausea

vomiting

abdominal cramps

Influenza-like:

fatigue

lethargy

myalgia

chills

sweating

headache

malaise

weakness

palpitations

Sensory disturbances:

paraesthesia

tremor

sensations of electric shock

Sleep disturbances:

insomnia

vivid dreams

nightmares

Extrapyramidal symptoms:

parkinsonism

akathisia

Note: This list is not exhaustive there may be other symptoms associated with withdrawal that have not been listed here.