

When to stop

The time to stop taking an antidepressant may be when you want to stop or when your doctor suggests stopping after considering your mental health and medication history.

A decision aid setting out the potential benefits and harms of both stopping and 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.

You may decide that you want to stop when:

- 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.

Your doctor may suggest stopping when:

- The recommended duration of antidepressant therapy is complete. Most clinical guidelines recommend around 6 – 12 months therapy.
- The risks of continuing an antidepressant outweigh the chance of benefit. Some risks increase with increasing age, for example the risk of having a fall or fracture, or with increasing duration of therapy such as the risk of weight gain and diabetes.



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