

RELEASE: Redressing long-term antidepressant use

Your family member or friend may be considering or attempting to stop antidepressant medication.

The RELEASE Tapering Plans provide flexible step-by-step guidance for slowly decreasing antidepressant dose to minimise withdrawal symptoms and enable people to stop antidepressants.



At lower drug doses, decrease the dose more slowly taking smaller step-downs. Slow tapering gives the brain and body time to adjust to being without antidepressants.

For supporting evidence and further information please visit www.releasetoolkit.com.au, or scan below:



CREATE CHANGE



The RELEASE research team from The University of Queensland.

This brochure is designed to help you to support someone that you care about who is considering or is attempting to decrease and stop antidepressants.

RELEASE Research Leads: Professor Katharine Wallis, Associate Professor Maria Donald

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Stopping Antidepressants

How family and friends can help



Long-term use of antidepressants (longer than 12-months) is not recommended for most people as there is little good evidence showing benefit in long-term use.

Most people experience at least one adverse-effect from long-term use. These can include:

- Emotional numbing, feeling detached or not caring
- Fatigue, lethargy, lack of motivation
- Weight gain
- Sexual problems including low sex drive and difficulty reaching orgasm in both men and women
- Increased risk of falls in older age

Your family member or friend may be attempting to stop antidepressants. Around half of people who reduce or stop antidepressants experience withdrawal symptoms. These symptoms are common and can be severe and long-lasting.

There are ways you can help and support someone as they wean off antidepressants.

Supporting someone you care about

What they most need from you is to be heard, believed and shown empathy.

Seek to understand their decision: Ask them about their experience of taking antidepressants; how antidepressants affect them and why they are stopping. Listen to their experience.

Respect their wishes: It can be difficult if you don't agree that stopping is best. Explain your thinking but respect their wishes.

Ask how you and others can help: This might include help with housework or reminding them about dose changes.

Observe and reassure: People may not recognise withdrawal symptoms in themselves or maybe unsure whether they are experiencing withdrawal symptoms or a return of their original condition (relapse).

Withdrawal symptoms are common and can include emotional symptoms such as anxiety, irritability, and tearfulness, as well as physical symptoms such as dizziness, light headedness, brain zaps, brain fog, fatigue, agitation, inability to concentrate and memory problems.

Provide encouragement: Just because stopping is difficult, does not mean that people have to stay on antidepressants for life. Slow tapering of dose, and pausing when necessary, can help to minimise withdrawal symptoms.

Try to be patient: Coming off antidepressants can be a slow process involving many small dose reductions over many months. Some people and some antidepressants need more time to stop.

Looking after yourself

It can be challenging to support someone through their tapering journey. You may feel nervous or worried, especially if you disagree with their decision. It might help to talk with them about your worries.

It is common to feel overwhelmed at times. It is important to remember to look after yourself so that you have the energy, time and distance to help your friend or family member.

- Set boundaries and don't take on too much. Decide what your limits are and how much you are able to help.
- Take a break and make time for yourself.
- Talk about how you are feeling with someone that you trust, taking care about how much information you share about the person you are supporting.
- Look after your physical health. Get regular physical activity, eat well, and practise relaxation techniques.

