

# Decision Aid

## Is now the right time for me to stop taking antidepressants?

Use this Decision Aid to help you decide if stopping antidepressants is right for you.

### RELEASE 3As brief intervention: Ask, Advise, Assist

- **Ask yourself:**
  - > How long have you been taking antidepressants?
  - > Have you ever thought about stopping or tried to stop antidepressants?
- **Advise/Did you know:**
  - > Clinical guidelines recommend only 6-12 months antidepressant therapy for a single episode of major depression, and non-drug therapy as first line for anxiety and less severe depression.
  - > Long-term use of antidepressants (longer than 12 months) is not harmless.
  - > Depression is not caused by a 'chemical imbalance' in the brain. Depression is not a long-term condition caused by low serotonin.
  - > People can experience withdrawal symptoms when stopping antidepressants. Withdrawal symptoms can be minimised by slow tapering of drug dose and will fade over time.
- **Assist/Help is available:**
  - > Your GP can provide a tapering plan that provides step by step guidance for slowly weaning off antidepressants over months and a prescription for the requisite antidepressant drug mini-doses.

## 1. Comparing my options

Stop taking antidepressants	Continue taking antidepressants
<p><b>What is usually involved?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slowly reducing and stopping antidepressants.</li> </ul> <p><b>What are the benefits of stopping?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No antidepressant side-effects. Your energy levels, motivation, sexual functioning, and weight control may improve, and you may regain the ability to feel happiness and excitement again.</li> <li>• No long-term risks. Long-term use of antidepressants is associated with increased risk of falls, heart disease, and death.</li> <li>• No more having to take a pill every day.</li> <li>• Save money (prescription costs).</li> </ul> <p><b>What are the downsides?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withdrawal symptoms. Withdrawal symptoms are unpleasant and can include dizziness, nausea, 'brain zaps', anxiety, crying, incoordination, difficulty concentrating, headache, sleep disturbance, and tremor. It is possible to minimise withdrawal symptoms with slow tapering of drug dose. Withdrawal symptoms diminish over time.</li> <li>• Depressive symptoms return. It is possible to develop strategies to cope with distress and low mood without medication.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What is usually involved?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep taking antidepressants.</li> <li>• You can stop sometime in the future.</li> </ul> <p><b>What are the benefits of continuing?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No withdrawal symptoms. Withdrawal symptoms are unpleasant and can include dizziness, nausea, 'brain zaps', anxiety, crying, incoordination, difficulty concentrating, headache, sleep disturbance, and tremor. Withdrawal symptoms are temporary and can be minimised by slow tapering of drug dose.</li> <li>• No risk of 'relapse'. You could develop strategies to cope with distress and low mood without medication.</li> </ul> <p><b>What are the risks of long-term use?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Antidepressant side-effects and risks. Longterm use of antidepressants is associated with emotional numbing, low sex drive and difficulty achieving orgasm, weight gain, tiredness and lack of motivation, increased risk of falls in older age, and at 10-years increased risk of heart disease and death (two-fold).</li> </ul>

## 2. Deciding what's right for me

Your feelings are important. In deciding whether to stop or keep taking antidepressants, think about what matters to you. Tick the box that best represents where you are on the scale.:

Reasons to stop taking	Reasons to keep taking
I want to live free of antidepressants	I don't mind taking antidepressants
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
I want to feel emotions again, highs and lows	I would rather not feel the ups and downs
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
I want my sex life back	Sex is not an issue for me
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
I want to see if stopping helps me lose weight	Weight is not an issue for me
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Antidepressants are not helping me	Antidepressants are helping me
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
I have strategies that help me manage distress and depressive symptoms	I am afraid of relapse and don't want to risk depressive symptoms
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
I can manage withdrawal symptoms through slow tapering and other strategies	I am afraid of withdrawal symptoms and don't want to risk withdrawal symptoms
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
My other important reasons/life circumstances:	
<input type="text"/>	

## 3. What I am thinking now: Is now the right time to stop antidepressants?

Now that you have thought about your options and feelings, you may have a general idea of where you stand on whether to stop or keep taking antidepressants.

Tick the box that best indicates what you are thinking currently: Stop taking or to keep taking?

I want to stop taking antidepressants	I want to keep taking antidepressants
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

## 4. Next Steps

Schedule an appointment to see your GP to review and discuss your antidepressant medication. Take this Decision Aid with you to your appointment. Your GP can discuss with you how to safely taper and stop antidepressants, if this is what you decide.

Jot down in the box at right any concerns or questions for your GP.

### RELEASE research project

Research Leads: Professor Katharine Wallis, Associate Professor Maria Donald  
 Ethical approval: The University of Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee (2022/HE001667)  
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