



Using *Traditional Antidepressants* in Children and Adolescents

This information explains how **Traditional Antidepressants** can be used as part of a treatment plan with children and adolescents. You may wish to share this information with your family members to help them to understand your treatment options. Since every person's needs are different, it is important that you follow the advice provided to you by your own doctor, nurse and/or pharmacist and speak to them if you have any questions about this medication.



What are Traditional Antidepressants used for?

There are many different classes of antidepressants available in Canada. Some classes have been available for over 30 years, while others are relatively new. Traditional antidepressants include several different types of antidepressants, such as tricyclic antidepressants (like imipramine, desipramine, nortriptyline, clomipramine and amitriptyline) and trazodone (Desyrel®). These medications, although called "antidepressants", can be used for several different conditions such as:

- Depression
- Anxiety Disorders such as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (clomipramine has been approved for use in children over 10 years old), Social Phobia, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Sleep disorders (like insomnia)
- Nerve related pain disorders
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Bedwetting (Imipramine is approved for use in children over 5 years old)

The name of the medication your doctor recommends is called: _____

These medications may also be tried with other conditions such as migraines or eating disorders. Your doctor may be using this medication for another reason. If you are unclear why this medication is being prescribed, please ask your doctor.



How do Traditional Antidepressants work?

Traditional antidepressants are known to increase the amount of certain chemicals in the brain called serotonin and norepinephrine (as well as other chemicals). It is believed that these brain chemicals are not working well in people who are depressed. The exact way that these medications improve the symptoms of Depression is still not fully known. The effect these medications have on other brain chemicals (like histamine and acetylcholine) may explain how these medications work to help improve symptoms of insomnia and bedwetting.

How well do traditional antidepressants work in children and adolescents?

Several traditional antidepressants have been studied in children and adolescents diagnosed with Depression, ADHD and/or an anxiety disorders. Though there is data supporting the use of certain several traditional antidepressants in children and adolescents with various psychiatric or medical conditions, the majority of well designed childhood depression studies have found that these medications are not better at treating the symptoms of Depression than a placebo (an inactive pill that looks like medication).

How should Traditional Antidepressants be taken?

Traditional antidepressants are usually taken once or twice a day. They are usually given as tablets. Amitriptyline is also available as a liquid. You can take this medication with or without food.

This medication should be taken at the same time each day (usually bedtime) as directed by your doctor. Try to connect it with something you do everyday (like brushing your teeth) so that you don't forget. Usually, your doctor will start with a low dose. Then, this dose may be slowly increased. You and your doctor can discuss the best dosage to stay on based on how well it helps decrease your symptoms and any side effects you have.

When will this medication start working?

This depends on what the medication is being used for. If you are using this medication for symptoms of insomnia, you may notice benefits in the first week of treatment. For most other conditions, these medications need to be taken for 3 to 6 weeks before you begin to feel better. Different symptoms start to improve at different rates. For example, improvements in appetite, energy, inattentive symptoms may be seen within the first 3 weeks. Full beneficial effects may take 4 to 8 weeks (or longer). Since these medications take time to work, do not increase, decrease or stop them without discussing it with your doctor.

If you are not feeling better within 6 to 8 weeks, your doctor may recommend you take a different antidepressant.

There is also a small possibility that depressive or anxiety symptoms may worsen or that you may experience some thoughts of self harm during the first couple months of taking this medication (see section on side effects below). If this happens, tell your doctor IMMEDIATELY!



How long do I have to take this medication?



This depends on the symptoms you have, how frequent they occur and how long you have had them. For sleep disorders, these medications are usually only taken for a short period of time a few weeks to a couple months. For other conditions, these medications may be needed for an indefinite amount of time (if you tolerate this medication well).

Once you have started taking this medication, your doctor and you will need to monitor for both the beneficial and unwanted effects of your medication. Your doctor will likely check your progress and discuss changes in symptoms during the next 3 months to confirm that the medication is working properly and that possible side effects are avoided.

Tip: Use the Antidepressant Monitoring Form to help measure your progress on this medication.

Are Traditional Antidepressants addictive?

No, these medications are not addictive and you will not have “cravings” for these medications like you might with nicotine or street drugs. If you and your doctor decide it is best to stop, your doctor will explain how to safely come off this medication so you don't feel negative effects as your body adjusts to being without it.

What are the side effects of this medication and what should I do if I get them?

As with most medications, side effects may occur with various traditional antidepressants. Most side effects are considered to be mild and temporary. Side effects may occur before any of the beneficial effects. It is possible for some individuals to experience a side effect that they feel is serious or long lasting. If this occurs, speak to your doctor about ways to manage them. Here are some of the more common side effects of taking traditional antidepressants. In brackets are suggested ways to lessen these effects.

Common side effects

Should any of these side effects be too troublesome for you, please discuss them with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

- Blurred vision
- Dry eyes
- Constipation (*increase exercise, fluids, fruits and fibre*)

Traditional Antidepressants

- Dizziness (*try getting up slowly from a sitting or lying down position*)
- Drowsiness (*try taking the dose at bedtime; this usually disappears*)
- Dry mouth (*try chewing sugarless gum, sour candies, ice chips, or popsicles*)
- Energized/agitated feelings (*avoid caffeine, from colas and coffee*)
- Headache (*try using a pain reliever like acetaminophen*)
- Increase in hunger (*avoid high calorie foods*)
- Weight gain (*monitor your food intake, increase your exercise*)
- Changes in sexual performance or drive (*discuss with your doctor*)
- Stomach aches and nausea (*try taking this medication with food or a glass of milk*)

Uncommon side effects (e.g., those that occur in less than 5% of patients)

Contact your doctor IMMEDIATELY if you have any of these side effects:

- Skin rash or itchy skin
- Tingling or tremor in the hands or feet
- An uncomfortable sense of inner restlessness or agitation
- Excessive sweating
- Irregular heartbeats
- Blood pressure changes
- A switch in mood to an unusual state of excitement, irritability or happiness
- Thoughts of self harm, hostility or suicide.

What precautions should my doctor and I be aware of when taking this medication?

- Report any changes in mood or thoughts of self harm to your doctor immediately.
- Do not stop taking this medication suddenly as this may result in the following: chills, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, tingling in hands and feet, muscle aches and fever.
- Several other medications can interact with traditional antidepressants. Before you begin taking any other new medication (prescription or non-prescription); or if you develop any new medical problem while you are taking this medication, check with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.
- Traditional antidepressants can make some individuals feel drowsy, dizzy or slowed down. If you experience these temporary side effects, it is important to avoid using heavy machinery or driving a car.
- Traditional antidepressants may increase the effects of alcohol, resulting in more sedation or dizziness.
- Tell your doctor if you miss a period, become pregnant or are trying to become pregnant.

Tip: Traditional Antidepressants can make some individuals feel drowsy, dizzy or slowed down. If you experience these temporary side effects, it is important to avoid operating heavy machinery or driving a car.



What should I do if I forget to take a dose?

If you take your medication only at bedtime and you forget to take it, skip the missed dose and continue with your schedule the next day. Do NOT double your next dose. If you take it more than once a day, take the missed dose as soon as possible. However, if it is almost time for your next dose (e.g., within 4 hours), do not take the missed dose or double up on next dose. Instead, continue your regular dosing schedule.



What storage conditions are needed for this medication?

- Keep this medication in the original container, stored at room temperature away from moisture and heat (e.g., not in the bathroom).
- Keep this medication out of reach from children.