

## Using *Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs)* In Children and Adolescents

Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) can be used as part of a treatment plan for children and adolescents with depression and anxiety. There are six SSRIs available in Canada: **citalopram (Celexa<sup>®</sup>)**, **escitalopram (Ciprallex<sup>®</sup>)**, **fluoxetine (Prozac<sup>®</sup>)**, **fluvoxamine (Luvox<sup>®</sup>)**, **paroxetine (Paxil<sup>®</sup>)**, **sertraline (Zoloft<sup>®</sup>)**. None of the SSRIs have been formally approved for use in children and adolescents in Canada, but some are approved in the US. When the potential benefits of using an SSRI outweighs the potential risks, doctors may prescribe one of these medications to treat: Major Depression, Depression associated with Bipolar Disorder, a variety of anxiety disorders, eating disorders, selective mutism, severe premenstrual mood changes. Your doctor may prescribe an SSRI for another reason. If you are unclear why this medication is being prescribed, ask your doctor.

SSRIs adjust the brain chemical serotonin, which may not be working well in people who are depressed or anxious. The exact way SSRIs improve Depression and Anxiety Disorders is still not fully known. There is good evidence that SSRIs are considerably more effective than a placebo at decreasing symptoms of anxiety and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). There is research supporting the use of certain SSRIs in children and adolescents with Depression. Some studies in childhood Depression have found that certain SSRIs are not better at treating the symptoms of Depression than a placebo. The addition of *Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)* (for depression) or *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)* to these medications may increase the potential for benefits from the medication.

SSRIs are usually taken once a day. You can take the medication with or without food but there may be less stomach upset if you take it with food or milk. The medication should be taken at the same time each day as directed by your doctor. Try to connect it with something you do every day (like eating breakfast or brushing your teeth) so that you don't forget. Usually, your doctor will start with a low dose of medication which will slowly be increased. Talk with your doctor about the best dosage to stay on based on how well it helps decrease your symptoms and any side effects you may be experiencing.

These medications need to be taken regularly for 3 to 6 weeks before you begin to feel better. Improvements in sleep, appetite and energy may be seen within the first 2 weeks, while other symptoms may take longer. Full benefits 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 a small possibility that depression or anxiety symptoms may worsen or that you may experience some thoughts of self harm during the first couple months on this medication. If this happens, **tell your doctor IMMEDIATELY!**

Most people need to take this medication for at least 6 months, but this depends on the symptoms you have, how frequently they occur and how long you have had them. This allows time for your symptoms to stabilize and for you to regain your functioning. After this time, talk with your doctor about the benefits and risks to continuing treatment. If you have had several episodes of severe depressive or anxiety symptoms, you may be asked to take this medication for an indefinite amount of time. By continuing to take this medication, you significantly decrease the chance that you may have another episode of depression or anxiety.

SSRIs are not addictive. If you and your doctor decide it is best to stop taking this medication, your doctor will explain how to safely lower the dose so you don't feel any "flu-like" effects (chills, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, tingling in hands and feet, muscle aches, fever and electrical sensations) as your body adjusts to being without this medication. Most side effects are mild and temporary. Side effects may occur before any of the beneficial effects. Some people may experience side effects that they feel may be serious or long lasting. If this happens, talk with your doctor about how to manage them. Other medications can interact with SSRIs, check with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist. before starting any new medication or if you develop any new medical problem while you are taking this medication. AVOID taking SSRIs with grapefruit as it may interact with some of these medications. Keep this medication in the original container stored at room temperature away from moisture and heat (e.g., not in the bathroom).

If you experience the temporary side effects of feeling drowsy, dizzy or slowed down, it is important to avoid operating heavy machinery or driving a car. SSRIs 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.

### If any of these mild side effects are troublesome for you, discuss them with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist

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|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| -Diarrhea                         | -Periods of physical restlessness | -Unusually vivid dreams                                  |
| -Difficulty sleeping              | -Headache                         | -Changes in sexual performance or interest (adolescents) |
| -Drowsiness/fatigue               | -Loss of appetite                 |  |
| -Mild energized/agitated feelings | -Stomach aches and nausea         |  |

### Uncommon mild side effects

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|---------------|--------------------------------|---|
| -Constipation | -Tingling in the hands or feet | -Apathy/Lack of Motivation                        |
| -Dizziness    | -Motor tics or muscle twitches | -Decrease in the rate of growth has been reported |
| -Dry mouth    | -Muscle stiffness              |   |

### Contact your doctor IMMEDIATELY if you have any of these uncommon, potentially serious side effects

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| -Unusual bruising or bleeding                            | -Switch in mood to excitement, irritability or happiness | -Unusual sensations or experiences (e.g. hallucinations) |
| -Skin rash or itchy skin                                 | -Severe energized or agitated feelings                   | -Thoughts of self harm, hostility or suicide             |
| -Uncomfortable sense of severe restlessness or agitation |  |  |



## SSRI Monitoring Form for Children and Adolescents

Patient Name: _____	Start Date: _____	Weight: _____ kg	Height: _____ cm
Medication Name: _____	Rater's Name: _____	Relationship to patient: _____	

This form is designed to help you, your caregivers and your doctor monitor how well your medication is working and measure any side effects you may be experiencing. Bring this form with you when you visit your doctor. **Directions:** Before you start the antidepressant (at "baseline") and at each of the time periods listed below, rate the following possible symptoms and side effects. Write the number that best describes your experience (on average over the past week) in the appropriate box based on the following scale:

<b>0 = not present</b> [I haven't noticed this]	<b>1 = a little</b> [it doesn't bother me]	<b>2 = a moderate amount</b> [it bothers me]	<b>3 = a severe amount</b> [it bothers me a lot]
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	Baseline	1 week	2 weeks	4 weeks	6 weeks	8 weeks	12 weeks
<b>Date</b>							
<b>Medication Dose (mg)</b>							
<b>Height (cm)</b>							
<b>Weight (kg)</b>							
<b>Depression &amp; Anxiety Symptoms</b>							
Feeling sad/Low mood							
Feeling things are hopeless							
Feeling tired throughout the day							
Guilty or worthless feelings							
Irritable mood							
Low interest in things you usually like							
Moving or speaking very slowly							
Not able to complete tasks							
Overeating (>3 large meals/day)							
Poor appetite (<2 regular meals/day)							
Sleeping too much (>12 hours/day)							
Thoughts of hurting yourself							
Trouble concentrating on a task							
Trouble falling or staying asleep							
Avoidance behaviors							
Compulsive habits							
Feeling overly worried							
Obsessive thoughts							
Panic attacks							
Social anxiety							
body aches & pains							
<b>Possible Side Effects</b>							
Apathy/Lack of Motivation							
Appetite gain or loss ( <i>circle one</i> )							
Constipation							
Diarrhea							
Feeling agitated							
Feeling dizzy or lightheaded							
Feeling nauseated or vomiting							
Feeling overly excited or happy							
Feeling overly tired or sleepy							
Headaches							
Inner sense of restlessness							
Skin rash							
Stomach aches							
Vivid dreams							
Sexual function altered ( <i>adolescents</i> )							
Sleeping too much/too little ( <i>circle one</i> )							
Sweating							
Thoughts of hurting yourself/others							
Twitching or muscle tremors							
Unusual bleeding or bruising							