

Factors to Consider When Stopping an Antidepressant Medication

Aim to foster collaborative supportive relationships with people withdrawing from an antidepressant medication.

Treatment Duration

Duration of treatment is dependent on the individual patient factors, such as:

- Ongoing circumstances that initially precipitated the condition or current circumstances impacting the condition
- Desire to continue treatment
- Tolerability of treatment
- Consistency with treatment
- Number of prior depressive episodes

Risk of return of symptoms that interfere with normal daily functioning is higher if the medication is discontinued too soon. If the patient has been stable for 6-12 months, begin regular conversations with the patient at each encounter about their circumstances and preference to continue treatment.

Discontinuation and Withdrawal Management

Antidepressant medications are challenging to discontinue for most people because withdrawal symptoms are common and can be distressing (Figure 1).¹

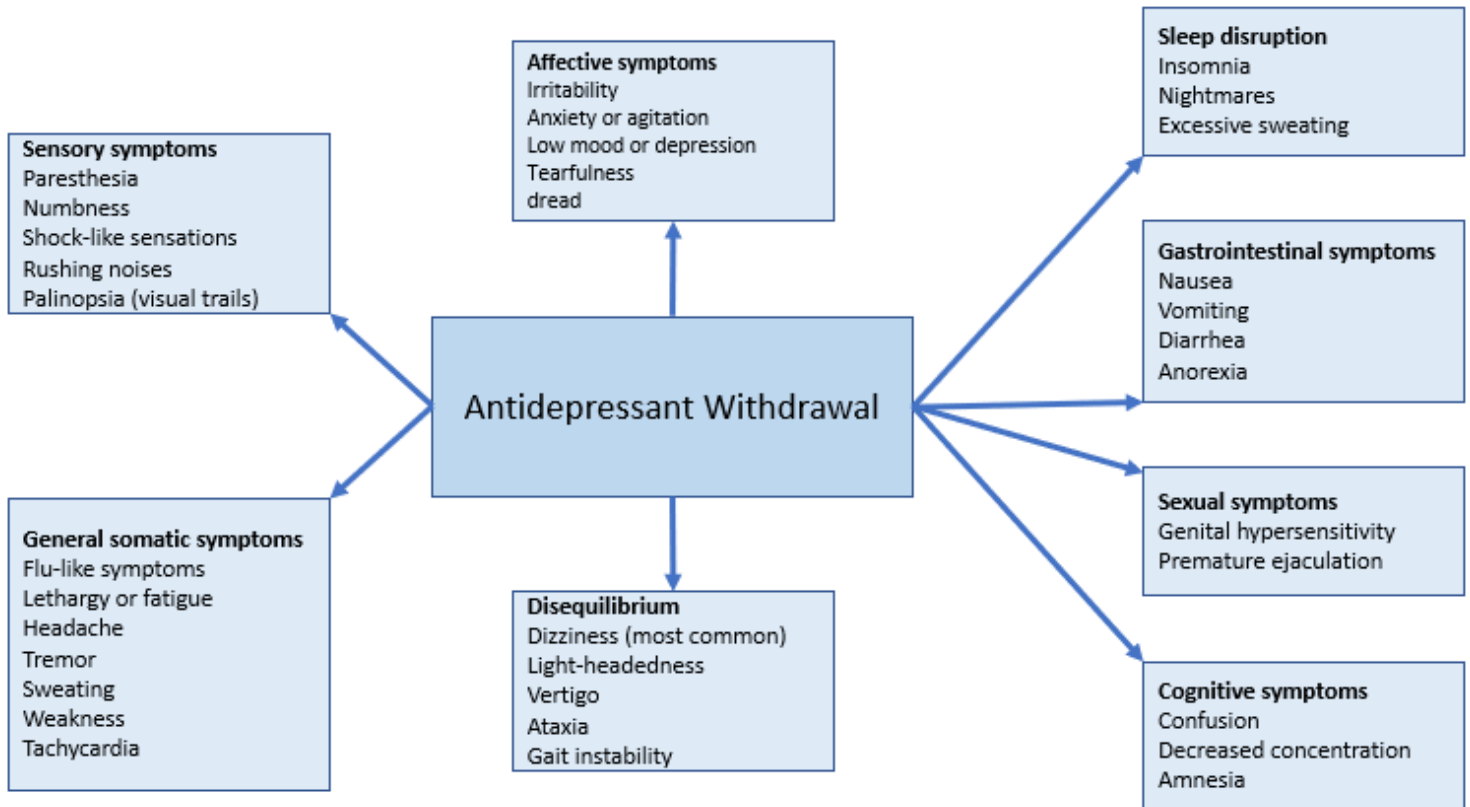
- **A provider should set reasonable expectations of these symptoms with the patient before tapering off treatment.**

Encourage the patient to control the rate of dose reduction in a stepwise fashion.

- Determine whether any distressing symptoms that emerge during the dose reduction process are withdrawal symptoms versus a re-emergence of symptoms previously relieved by the medication.
- Be cautious when considering treating withdrawal symptoms with another medication. Use only if needed and discontinue it as soon as possible.
- The duration of taper, in order to minimize withdrawal symptoms, is *highly variable* for each individual and each medication, ranging from weeks to months. It is not uncommon for people to experience withdrawal for several months, or even longer.²
- Pause, or slow the taper as needed to mitigate withdrawal symptoms. The dose taper may need to be slower towards the end of the tapering process.

The taper should be individually tailored to meet the patient's needs and mitigate withdrawal symptoms.

Figure 1. Symptoms of Antidepressant Medication Withdrawal.² (Adapted from Horowitz, et al.)



Patient Monitoring

Engage the patient with frequent and regular touchpoints to provide ongoing support and encouragement during the dose reduction process. This process will ensure:

- Adequate assessment of current symptoms; and
- Timely dose-reduction adjustments.

Utilize convenient mechanisms for the patient to reach out to the provider or their delegate.

- Follow-up does not necessarily need to be conducted in-person.
- Online messaging, video consults or phone consults can offer timely responses that help maintain a strong collaborative relationship with the patient.

It is helpful to set expectations with the patient about when it might be appropriate to re-start the antidepressant medication.

References

1. Davies J, Read J. A systematic review into the incidence, severity and duration of antidepressant withdrawal effects: Are guidelines evidence-based? *Addict Behav.* 2019 Oct;97:111-121. doi: 10.1016/j.addbeh.2018.08.027.
2. Horowitz MA, Taylor D. Tapering of SSRI treatment to mitigate withdrawal symptoms. *Lancet Psychiatry.* 2019 Jun;6(6):538-546. doi: 10.1016/S2215-0366(19)30032-X.

You can get this document in other languages, large print, braille or a format you prefer.

Contact Oregon Prescription Drug Program, Amanda Parish at 503-383-8142 or email amanda.b.parish@oha.oregon.gov

We accept all relay calls or you can dial 711.