



If your doctor or mental health professional has diagnosed you with depression, you may need to take an antidepressant. These drugs can alleviate the symptoms of depression, but they can also have serious side effects, so you don't want to take one unless it's necessary.

To help you and your doctor choose the right antidepressant from the 12 now available, *Consumer Reports* has evaluated the drugs in this category based on their effectiveness, safety, and cost. This 2-page brief is a summary of a free 24-page report you can access on the Internet at ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs.

DO YOU NEED AN ANTIDEPRESSANT?

You probably don't need to take an antidepressant if your "blues" are mild, triggered by a recent stressful life event, such as divorce, job loss, illness, or losing a loved one, and you are still functioning pretty well in life. You are more likely to need an antidepressant if your low mood has lasted longer than two weeks, you are not functioning well in life, you have five or more of the symptoms listed in the box below, and you have had previous bouts of depression. If you have had depression symptoms intermittently or at a low-grade level for several months, see a doctor or a therapist. You may want to try psychotherapy or counseling first, before taking a medicine.

THE SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

- Feelings of unhappiness, hopelessness, pessimism
- Feelings of low self-esteem, worthlessness, guilt
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies, work, and activities you usually enjoy, including sex
- Decreased energy, fatigue, feeling "slowed down"
- Insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Appetite changes (eating significantly less or more)
- Irritability, restlessness, hostility
- Feeling anxious; low tolerance for stress
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- Unexplained physical symptoms or pains—such as headaches or chronic indigestion—that do not respond to treatment

Antidepressants help relieve depression symptoms in 55 to 70 percent of people who take them. If you don't respond to the first drug prescribed—about 30 to 40 percent of people don't—your doctor can increase the dose or switch you to another one. The vast majority of people who take antidepressants (90 percent) experience at least one side effect. Most tolerate mild ones without much difficulty; but up to a third stop taking the medication all together.

Our independent evaluations are based on scientific reviews conducted by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. These materials were made possible by a grant from the state Attorney General Consumer and Prescriber Education Grant Program, which is funded by the multi-state settlement of consumer fraud claims regarding the marketing of the prescription drug Neurontin (gabapentin).

Our Recommendations

Our evaluation of the evidence found that no antidepressant has been shown to be any more effective than any other. But they do cause different side effects, so your choice may be based on the particular side effects a drug causes and costs. You should also know that people respond to antidepressants differently, so it's not uncommon to try two or three before finding one that works.

We have chosen five antidepressants as *Consumer Reports Health Best Buy Drugs* to consider as initial options for treating depression:

- Generic bupropion
- Generic citalopram
- Generic fluoxetine
- Generic paroxetine
- Generic sertraline

These medicines are substantially less expensive than brand-name antidepressants and are as equally effective.

Talk with your doctor about starting with a low dose of an antidepressant to minimize side effects. If an antidepressant doesn't help within six to eight weeks, talk with your doctor about a higher dose or switching to another antidepressant. If you took an antidepressant before and it worked, you may want to stick with that one.

The information in this brief was last updated in April 2011

Antidepressants: Examples of Possible Side Effects

Relatively minor; usually short-lived

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Diarrhea ■ Dizziness ■ Dry mouth ■ Headaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nausea ■ Sweating ■ Tremors
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More serious. Can be dangerous. May need to switch drugs if they persist.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Drowsiness or confusion ■ Feeling of panic or dread ■ Increased thoughts of suicide ■ Insomnia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Loss of libido, difficulty achieving erections, inability to reach orgasm ■ Nervousness and agitation ■ Weight gain
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Antidepressants: Drug Comparison*

 indicates the dose of that drug is available for a low monthly cost through programs offered by chain stores. For example, Kroger, Sam's Club, Target, and Walmart offer a month's supply of selected generic drugs for \$4 or a three-month supply for \$10. Other stores, such as Costco, CVS, Kmart, and Walgreens, offer similar programs. Some programs have restrictions or membership fees, so check the details carefully for restrictions and to make sure your drug is covered.

Generic Name and Strength	Brand Name ^A	Frequency of Use ^B	Average Monthly Cost ^C
Bupropion 75 mg tablet	Wellbutrin	Three a day	\$283
 Bupropion 75 mg tablet	Generic	Three a day	\$53
Bupropion 100 mg tablet	Wellbutrin	Three a day	\$360
 Bupropion 100 mg tablet	Generic	Three a day	\$62
Bupropion 100 mg sustained-release tablet	Wellbutrin SR	Two a day	\$254
Citalopram 10 mg tablet	Celexa	One a day	\$127
 Citalopram 10 mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$33 
Desvenlafaxine 50 mg sustained-release tablet	Pristiq	One a day	\$157
Duloxetine 20 mg capsule	Cymbalta	One a day	\$166
Escitalopram 10 mg tablet	Lexapro	One a day	\$121
Escitalopram 20 mg tablet	Lexapro	One a day	\$124
Fluoxetine 10 mg capsule	Prozac	One a day	\$227
 Fluoxetine 10 mg capsule	Generic	One a day	\$22 
 Fluoxetine 10 mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$41 
Fluvoxamine 50 mg tablet	Generic	Two a day	\$106
Fluvoxamine 100 mg tablet	Generic	Two a day	\$99
Fluvoxamine 100 mg continuous-delivery capsule	Luvox CR	One a day	\$213
Mirtazapine 15 mg tablet	Remeron	One at bedtime	\$155
Mirtazapine 15 mg tablet	Generic	One at bedtime	\$44
Nefazodone 50 mg tablet ^D	Generic	Two a day	\$65
Nefazodone 100 mg tablet ^D	Generic	Two a day	\$66
Paroxetine 10 mg tablet	Paxil	One a day	\$142
 Paroxetine 10 mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$20 
Paroxetine 20 mg tablet	Paxil	One a day	\$143
Paroxetine 20 mg tablet	Pexeva	One a day	\$201
 Paroxetine 20 mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$22 
Paroxetine 12.5 mg sustained-release tablet	Paxil CR	One a day	\$130
Paroxetine 12.5 mg sustained-release tablet	Generic	One a day	\$99
Sertraline 25 mg tablet	Zoloft	One a day	\$152
 Sertraline 25 mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$29 
Sertraline 50 mg tablet	Zoloft	One a day	\$146
 Sertraline 50 mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$28
Venlafaxine 37.5 mg tablet	Effexor	Two a day	\$172
Venlafaxine 37.5 mg tablet	Generic	Two a day	\$88
Venlafaxine 37.5 mg sustained-release capsule	Effexor XR	One a day	\$168
Venlafaxine 37.5 mg sustained-release tablet	Generic	One a day	\$123

NOTE: The information contained in the *Consumer Reports Health Best Buy Drugs*™ reports is for general informational purposes and is not intended to replace consultation with a physician or other health-care professional. Consumers Union is not liable for any loss or injury related to your use of the reports. The reports are intended solely for individual, non-commercial use and may not be used in advertising, promotion, or for any other commercial purpose.

*Selected doses are listed due to space limitations. For a more complete listing, see our full report at: ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs.

A. "Generic" indicates drug sold by generic name

B. As typically prescribed.

C. Prices reflect nationwide retail average for January 2011, rounded to the nearest dollar. Information derived by *Consumer Reports Health Best Buy Drugs* from data provided by Wolters Kluwer Pharma Solutions, which is not involved in our analysis or recommendations.

D. The brand-name version of generic nefazodone (Serzone) was removed from the market but the generic version is still available. This drug has been associated with reports of severe liver damage and should be used with caution.