

LET'S GET SSRI-IOUS.

The parent's guide to selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors



Why is my child taking this?

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRI's for short, treat lots of mental health conditions like depression or anxiety. These conditions can cause people to have extreme emotions and feelings (sometimes being really sad for a little reason or being really scared or stressed over something that's not a big deal). Medications like SSRI's help keep those feelings from getting so extreme, which can be unpleasant for the person experiencing them.



What medications are SSRIs?

The most common SSRIs are fluoxetine or Prozac (the brand name), sertraline or Zoloft, escitalopram or Lexapro, and citalopram or Celexa.



How do SSRIs work?

Our nervous system, which includes our brain and spinal cord, controls everything in our body including pain, talking, emotions, breathing, and way more. It talks to our whole body through nerves. Our brain sends messages through these nerves using electricity, like a cord plugged into an outlet, and through chemicals that float from one nerve to the next. One of these chemicals is serotonin. Serotonin is one of the chemicals that keeps our emotions stable. People with depression and anxiety are storing too much of their serotonin and not using it. SSRI's tell our nerves to not put as much serotonin back in storage so it can keep regulating emotions.



When will I start to notice a difference in my child's mood?

SSRIs need a chance to build up in the body before feeling their full effect. This can take between a month and 6 weeks. You or your child may notice some differences sooner such as better mood or having more energy.



Is my child going to have any side effects from SSRIs?

Side effects from these medications are typically mild. They may cause some stomach upset and diarrhea, as well as trouble sleeping, headaches, dizziness, anxiety. If you feel your child's mood is getting worse or they begin to have thoughts of hurting themselves, call your provider to stop the medication immediately. Severe side effects are rare but may occur if your child is taking certain other medications. These include confusion, fever, dizziness, muscle jerking, and excessive vomiting or diarrhea. If your child experiences these symptoms stop the medication immediately and go to the emergency room.



Will this medication cure my child's depression or anxiety?

SSRIs are not a cure, but they help a lot of people lead much happier lives. SSRIs are also not the only thing you can do for your mental health. Research shows taking an SSRI and seeing a licensed therapist is proven to be the best treatment for mental health conditions. Living with anxiety and depression can be hard, but lots of people are still able to live successful lives. If you don't feel like this medication is working for you, you can talk to your provider about taking a different one, changing your dose, or adding another medication for you to take. If you are interested in other ways to improve your mood that do not involve medication, ask your provider about their coping strategies handout.



Will my child be on this medication for the rest of their life?

Not necessarily. Some people only need an SSRI to get through a particularly stressful or difficult part of their lives. Other people find them very helpful and take them for years. Every person is different and should do what is right for them.



Does being on this medication mean there is something wrong with my child?

Not at all! The CDC estimates that as many as 1 out of every 10 people takes some sort of medication for a mental health condition. You probably have friends, family members, teachers, coworkers and more that benefit from these medications.



How much do these medications cost?

SSRIs are covered by most private health insurance plans as well as Medicare and Medicaid. However, there may still be additional costs. Websites such as GoodRx, PharmacyChecker, and WeRx provide discounts on SSRIs as low as \$5 per prescription.

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The adolescent's guide to selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors



Why am I taking this?

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Am I weird for having to take this medication?

Not at all! The CDC estimates that as many as 1 out of every 10 people takes some sort of medication for a mental health condition. You probably have friends, family members, teachers, coworkers and more that benefit from these medications.

COPING SKILLS

Strategies for managing anxiety in the moment

Relax

Lot easier said than done right?

Relaxation is actually a skill you can practice
Recommended practice to hone your relaxation skills:

- Meditation Apps: Insight Timer (free), Headspace (some free content), Calm (subscription)
- Guided Meditation on Youtube
- Breathing techniques (look up gifs to breathe with or try breathing in for 4 seconds and breathing out for 4 seconds.

Exercise

Exercise may be the last thing you want to do when you're not feeling great, but studies show it is one of the most effective ways to alleviate stress and anxiety:

- You don't have to be a Crossfit star to exercise. Just take a quick walk around your neighborhood.
- Try yoga with or without a studio. Check out free yoga videos on Youtube or free apps
- You can exercise without leaving your house! Checkout free apps or videos by searing at home workouts

Distract Yourself

With intense emotions, sometimes distracting yourself with things you like can be a fast and effective strategy:

- Try adult coloring books or apps
- Try something that keeps your hands busy like knitting or crocheting
- Watch your favorite tv show or movie
- Listen to a podcast
- Play a relaxing game
- Read something for pleasure
- And other small things that make you happy!

Talk it out

Putting big emotions into words can make them seem a lot smaller:

- Talk to a trusted friend, family member, or adult
- Try journaling, even just a line a day
- Talk to a counselor (ask your doctor for suggestions)
- Even if you don't want to talk about what you're feeling quite yet, avoid over-isolating yourself; sit with friends or members of your family
- If you are in crisis you can always call 9-1-1, check out other numbers to call for non-emergency situations on the back

Reframe How You Think

One of the major therapy treatments for anxiety is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). The goal of CBT is to form a habit of thinking positively. Here are some examples of reframing thoughts:

- Instead of "I failed a quiz so I'll always be a failure," try "I failed a quiz; I'll study harder for the next one."
- Instead of "I know if I ask them out, they'll say no" try "I hope they say yes if I ask them on."
- Instead of "Everyone saw what I did and is laughing at me behind my back," try "It was not that bad; it's okay to mess up sometimes."

Grounding

When panicking or having lots of anxiety, controlling thoughts can feel much harder than usual. Grounding exercises can help you refocus your mind on something other than your anxiety. Search grounding exercises for ideas or check out the back of this paper for one.

THE WORLD AROUND ME

5 THINGS I CAN
SEE

4 THINGS I
CAN FEEL

3 THINGS I CAN
HEAR

2 THINGS I CAN
SMELL

1 THING I CAN
TASTE