



IF YOUR DOCTOR or mental health professional has diagnosed you as depressed, you may need to take an antidepressant. Ten antidepressants are now available, ranging in cost from \$32 to more than \$200 per month.

To help you and your doctor choose an antidepressant, *Consumer Reports* has evaluated the drugs in this category based on their effectiveness, safety, side effects, and cost. This two-page brief is a summary of an in-depth report you can access on the Internet at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org. You can also learn about other drugs we've analyzed on this free Web site. Our independent evaluations are based on scientific reviews conducted by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. Grants from the Engelberg Foundation and the National Library of Medicine help fund *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*.

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 the death of 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 three weeks or longer, 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
- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- Unexplained physical symptoms or pains – such as headache, chronic indigestion or pain – that do not respond to treatment

Our Recommendations

No antidepressant has been shown to be any more effective than any other, but they differ in the side effects they cause. Your choice may be based primarily on a comparison of side effects as well as costs. In addition, people respond to antidepressants differently. You may have to try two or more before finding one that works for you.

We have chosen three antidepressants at specific doses as *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*:

- **Generic fluoxetine** 10mg or 20mg taken once a day at a cost of \$32 to \$37 per month.
- **Generic citalopram** 20mg or 40mg once a day at a cost of \$50 to \$52 per month.
- **Generic bupropion** 75mg or 100mg three times a day at a cost of \$60 to \$71 per month.

These medicines are less expensive than most other antidepressants and are as effective and safe.

Talk with your doctor about starting with a low dose of an antidepressant to minimize side effects. Also, tell your doctor if you have anxiety or panic attacks. This will help determine which antidepressant is best for you.

See the cost comparison table on page 2. The information in this brief was last updated in July 2005.

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Antidepressant Side Effects









Relatively minor. Usually short-lived.

- Headache
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Dizziness
- Sweating
- Tremor
- Dry Mouth

Not so minor. Can be dangerous. If they persist, may need to switch drugs.

- Nervousness and agitation
- Feeling of panic or dread
- Increased thoughts of suicide
- Insomnia
- Drowsiness or confusion
- Loss of libido, difficulty achieving erections, inability to reach orgasm
- Weight gain

Antidepressant Cost Comparison – Examples¹

	Generic Name with Dose per Day	Brand Name ²	Frequency of Use	Average Monthly Cost ³
	Bupropion 75mg tablet	Wellbutrin	Three a day	\$148
	Bupropion 75mg tablet	Generic	Three a day	\$60
	Bupropion 100mg tablet	Wellbutrin	Three a day	\$194
	Bupropion 100mg tablet	Generic	Three a day	\$71
	Citalopram 20mg tablet	Celexa	One a day	\$94
	Citalopram 20mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$50
	Citalopram 40mg tablet	Celexa	One a day	\$98
	Citalopram 40mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$52
	Duloxetine 20mg enteric coated capsule	Cymbalta	Two a day	\$237
	Duloxetine 30mg enteric coated capsule	Cymbalta	Two a day	\$269
	Escitalopram 5mg tablet	Lexapro	One a day	\$87
	Escitalopram 10mg tablet	Lexapro	One a day	\$86
	Fluoxetine 10mg capsule	Prozac	One a day	\$140
	Fluoxetine 10mg capsule	Generic	One a day	\$35
	Fluoxetine 10mg tablet	Prozac	One a day	\$143
	Fluoxetine 10mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$35
	Fluoxetine 20mg capsule	Prozac	One a day	\$150
	Fluoxetine 20mg capsule	Generic	One a day	\$32
	Fluoxetine 20mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$37
	Fluvoxamine 50mg tablet	Luvox	One at bedtime	\$102
	Fluvoxamine 50mg tablet	Generic	One at bedtime	\$67
	Mirtazapine 15mg tablet	Remeron	One at bedtime	\$109
	Mirtazapine 15mg tablet	Generic	One at bedtime	\$56
	Paroxetine 10mg tablet	Paxil	One a day	\$102
	Paroxetine 10mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$66
	Paroxetine 20mg tablet	Paxil	One a day	\$105
	Paroxetine 20mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$67
	Sertraline 25mg tablet	Zoloft	One a day	\$100
	Sertraline 50mg tablet	Zoloft	One a day	\$98
	Venlafaxine 25mg tablet	Effexor	Two a day	\$136
	Venlafaxine 50mg tablet	Effexor	Two a day	\$143
	Venlafaxine 75mg tablet	Effexor	Two a day	\$146

UNDERSTANDING GENERICS: A generic drug is one that is sold under its generic name. For example, in this table, bupropion is the generic and chemical name, as given in column one, and Wellbutrin is the brand name of the same drug, as given in column two. Generics are less expensive. Several antidepressants, such as Zoloft and Cymbalta, are not yet available as generics. But their generic/chemical name is still listed in column one.

(1) For a complete list of antidepressants and their costs, at various doses, go to www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org to access the full 22-page antidepressant report.

(2) "Generic" indicates drug sold by generic name.

(3) Prices reflect nationwide retail average for May 2005, rounded to the nearest dollar; data provided by NDC Health, a healthcare information company.