



Antidepressants

Comparing Effectiveness, Safety, and Price

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 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 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

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

The information in this brief was last updated in July 2009.

Antidepressants: Examples of Possible Side Effects

Relatively minor; usually short-lived

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| • Diarrhea | • Nausea |
| • Dizziness | • Sweating |
| • Dry mouth | • Tremors |
| • Headaches | |

More serious. Can be dangerous. May need to switch drugs if they persist.

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

Antidepressants: Drug Comparison*

	Generic Name and Strength	Brand Name ¹	Frequency of Use ²	Average Monthly Cost ³
	Bupropion 75 mg tablet	Wellbutrin	Three a day	\$302
CR BEST BUY	Bupropion 75 mg tablet	Generic	Three a day	\$58
	Bupropion 100 mg tablet	Wellbutrin	Two to four a day	\$294 - \$588
CR BEST BUY	Bupropion 100 mg tablet	Generic	Two to four a day	\$43 - \$86
	Bupropion 100 mg sustained-release tablet	Wellbutrin SR	Two a day	\$246
	Citalopram 10 mg tablet	Celexa	One a day	\$149
CR BEST BUY	Citalopram 10 mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$35
	Desvenlafaxine 50 mg sustained-release tablet	Pristiq	Once a day	\$155
	Duloxetine 20 mg capsule	Cymbalta	Two a day	\$325
	Escitalopram 10 mg tablet	Lexapro	One a day	\$119
	Escitalopram 20 mg tablet	Lexapro	One a day	\$123
	Fluoxetine 10 mg capsule	Prozac	One to two a day	\$213 - \$426
CR BEST BUY	Fluoxetine 10 mg capsule	Generic	One to two a day	\$22 - \$44
	Fluoxetine 10 mg tablet	Prozac	One to two a day	\$201 - \$402
CR BEST BUY	Fluoxetine 10 mg tablet	Generic	One to two a day	\$44 - \$88
	Fluvoxamine 50 mg tablet	Generic	One to two a day	\$67 - \$134
	Fluvoxamine 100 mg tablet	Luvox	One to two a day	\$91 - \$182 ⁴
	Fluvoxamine 100 mg tablet	Generic	One to two a day	\$58 - \$116
	Fluvoxamine 100 mg continuous-delivery capsule	Luvox CR	One a day	\$178
	Mirtazapine 15 mg tablet	Remeron	One at bedtime	\$158
	Mirtazapine 15 mg tablet	Generic	One at bedtime	\$50
	Nefazodone 50 mg tablet ⁵	Generic	Two a day	\$72
	Nefazodone 100 mg tablet ⁵	Generic	Two a day	\$70
	Paroxetine 10 mg tablet	Paxil	One a day	\$135
CR BEST BUY	Paroxetine 10 mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$23
	Paroxetine 20 mg tablet	Paxil	One a day	\$145
	Paroxetine 20 mg tablet	Pexeva	One a day	\$203
CR BEST BUY	Paroxetine 20 mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$21
	Paroxetine 12.5 mg sustained-release tablet	Paxil CR	One a day	\$127
	Paroxetine 12.5 mg sustained-release tablet	Generic	One a day	\$104
	Sertraline 25 mg tablet	Zoloft	One a day	\$144
CR BEST BUY	Sertaline 25 mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$37
	Sertraline 50 mg tablet	Zoloft	One a day	\$133
CR BEST BUY	Sertaline 50 mg tablet	Generic	One a day	\$33
	Venlafaxine 25 mg tablet	Effexor	Two to three a day	\$171 - \$256
	Venlafaxine 25 mg tablet	Generic	Two to three a day	\$107 - \$161
	Venlafaxine 37.5 mg sustained-release capsule	Effexor XR	One a day	\$160
	Venlafaxine 37.5 mg sustained-release tablet	Generic	One a day	\$112

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

1. "Generic" indicates drug sold by generic name
2. As typically prescribed.
3. Prices reflect nationwide retail average for May 2009, rounded to the nearest dollar. Information derived by *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* from data provided by Wolters Kluwer Health, Pharmaceutical Audit Suite®. Wolters Kluwer Health is not involved in our analysis or recommendations.
4. Price based on fewer than 20 prescriptions in one month.
5. 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.

NOTE: The information contained in the *Consumer Reports 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.