Patient Decision Aid for Medication Management to Treat Depression

Your options:

- Take antidepressants to treat depression.
- Don't take antidepressants.
- If you're pregnant, there may be other issues that affect your decision. Pregnant women require more information on potential risks to the developing baby, and will be monitored closely.

Key points to remember:

- Taking medicine for your depression can help you get your life back to normal, especially if you also receive counseling. If your symptoms are mild, lifestyle changes and counseling may be all you need.
- You don't need to feel ashamed about taking antidepressants. Depression is a medical diagnosis, not a character flaw or weakness. The medicines will not change your personality.
- Side effects are one reason that people stop taking antidepressants. But talk to your doctor. There are many ways to manage side effects. Lowering the dose or changing medicines may also help.
- The thought of needing to take medicine over a period of time can be scary. Many people are able to slowly stop taking antidepressants after a while.

What are antidepressants?

- Antidepressants are medicines which have a positive effect on certain chemicals in the brain, thereby reducing symptoms of depression. They can improve your symptoms or eliminate them completely.
- There are several kinds of antidepressants. There is no evidence that one works better than another. But the side effects are different.
- Antidepressants don't change your personality. They help your symptoms.

How well do antidepressants work?

- Most people are able to find an antidepressant that helps their depression, but sometimes, antidepressants don't work right away. And you may need to try a few before you find one that works. The right medicine is one that helps your symptoms and has the fewest side effects.
- You may start to feel better within 2 to 3 weeks after you start taking an antidepressant. But you may need to take it for as long as 6 to 8 weeks to see an improvement.
- It's best to keep taking your medicine for at least 6 months after you feel better. If this is not the first time you have been depressed, your doctor may want you to take these medicines even longer.
- Antidepressants can change how you feel and respond in certain situations, but they don't change who you are. You may feel more relaxed, more social, more assertive, or more outgoing when you are taking an antidepressant.
- Depression treated only with antidepressants, and not also with talk therapy, is more likely to come back later.

What side effects can antidepressants cause?

- Most antidepressants cause minor side effects that go away or improve in the first few weeks of treatment. If you keep taking your medicine, there is a good chance that you will start to feel less depressed and that the side effects will decrease.
- Most people feel that the benefits of antidepressants are well worth living with some side effects.

Side effects may vary depending on the medicine you take, but common ones include:

- Nausea
- Dry mouth
- Headaches
- Loss of appetite
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Sexual problems (loss of desire, erection problems)
- Trouble falling asleep, or waking a lot during the night
- Weight gain
- Feeling nervous or on edge
- Feeling drowsy in the daytime

Counseling is an important part of the treatment for depression. The types of counseling most often used for treatment of depression include:

- Cognitive-behavioral therapy, which teaches you how to become healthier by changing certain thought and behavior patterns.
- Interpersonal therapy, which focuses on your relationships and the problems they may be causing.
- Problem-solving therapy, which focuses on the problems you are facing and on helping you find solutions.
- Family therapy, which involves the entire family.

There are also lifestyle changes you may be able to make that may help your depression symptoms:

- Eat healthy foods.
- Don't drink alcohol.
- Get regular exercise.
- Get a good night's sleep.
- Get social support from family and friends, which includes face-to-face contact.
- Try to keep a positive attitude—remember that feeling better takes time, and your mood will improve little by little.

Besides counseling and lifestyle changes, there are some other treatments you can try:

- Alternative treatments such as massage therapy and yoga may help you get better faster by improving your ability to cope with stress.
- You can try relaxation exercises at home to lower your stress.

Your provider might suggest that you try antidepressants if:

- You have tried counseling and lifestyle changes, and they haven't worked.
- Your symptoms are interfering with your daily life.