

# Discontinuing Antidepressants

## How do you safely stop antidepressants?

Discontinuing a patient's antidepressant medication may be appropriate for various reasons such as sustained clinical improvement, change in treatment from pharmacotherapy to psychotherapy, or serious adverse effects.

**Tapering is generally recommended** to avoid antidepressant discontinuation syndrome (severe symptoms of dizziness, fatigue, nausea, and headaches). See the table below for risk of antidepressant discontinuation syndrome by medication.

The duration of the taper varies based on individual drugs. Here are some rules of thumb:

- The higher the medication dosage, the longer the taper
- Fluoxetine: 1-2 weeks
- Venlafaxine: 4 weeks
- Other drugs: 2-4 weeks

Risk of antidepressant discontinuation syndrome	Medication
High	Paroxetine, Fluvoxamine, Venlafaxine, Imipramine, Nortriptyline, Phenelzine, Tranylcypromine
Intermediate	Sertraline, Duloxetine, Desvenlafaxine, Trazodone, Vortioxetine, Amitriptyline, Clomipramine, Desipramine, Doxepin
Low	Fluoxetine, Citalopram, Escitalopram, Bupropion XL, Mirtazapine, Doxepin, Levomilnacipran, Milnacipran, Vilazodone

Adapted from Hirsch et al. "Discontinuing antidepressant medications in adults" and Zwiebel et al. "Discontinuing antidepressant: Pearls and pitfalls"

Note that [multiple studies](#) have shown that maintenance antidepressants **reduce the risk of depression recurrence**.

For example, researchers in the U.K. conducted a [randomized controlled trial](#) of patients who had been taking antidepressants for  $\geq 9$  months and felt well enough to consider stopping their medication. Patients who were assigned to continue taking their antidepressant for 1 year were less likely to have depression recurrence than patients assigned to taper and discontinue their antidepressant (39% vs. 56% recurrence; hazard ratio 2.06).

For patients who do decide to discontinue antidepressant treatment, the risk of recurrence is [significantly lower](#) when tapering is done in conjunction with cognitive behavioral therapy.