

Medications

Antidepressant medication is often prescribed for postnatal depression, especially if the depression is moderate or severe. Symptoms such as low mood, poor sleep, poor concentration and irritability are often eased with an antidepressant. This may then allow you to function more normally, and increase your ability to cope better with your new baby.

Antidepressants do not usually work straight away. It takes 2-4 weeks before their effect builds up fully. A common problem is that some people stop the medication after a week or so as they feel that it is not working. You need to give it time. Also, if it is helping, follow the course that a doctor recommends. A normal course of antidepressants lasts up to six months or more after symptoms have eased. Some people stop treatment too early and the depression can quickly return.

There 2 most common class of antidepressants used in post natal depression nowadays are the *selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors or SSRIs* (for example, Paroxetine (Seroxat®) and Sertraline (Lustral®)) and *tri-cyclic antidepressants* (for example amitriptyline, lofepramine). They could differ in their possible side-effects. If the first one that you try does not suit, you may be switched to another one. Do tell your doctor if you have any problems with an antidepressant. Antidepressants are not thought to be addictive and you will not have to take them for life.

Some antidepressants are excreted in breast milk. The amounts are very small and are unlikely to cause any harm to the baby. However, if you are breast-feeding your doctor is likely to choose a medicine that is well established and has a good safety record with breast-feeding mothers rather than a newer medicine with less data about confirming safety in babies.

About 5-7 in 10 people with moderate or severe depression improve within a few weeks of starting treatment with a prescribed antidepressant. However, up to 3 in 10 people improve with dummy tablets (placebo) as some people would have improved in this time naturally. So, you are roughly twice as likely to improve with antidepressants compared to taking no treatment. But, antidepressants do not always work for everybody. Having counselling and other forms of support are just as important in the treatment plan.

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