

Depression: Should You Consider Antipsychotics?

Treatment starts with antidepressants

If you are diagnosed with depression, your doctor will probably prescribe an antidepressant. The ones that are used most often include bupropion (Wellbutrin), citalopram (Celexa), escitalopram (Lexapro), fluoxetine (Prozac), paroxetine (Paxil), and sertraline (Zoloft).

Antidepressants help over half of the people who use them. However, it can take one to two months for them to work. Sometimes people have to try several different ones, as well as different doses, to find what works best for them. Some people do best with a combination of two different antidepressants.

For some people, antidepressants alone do not work well enough. If this happens, some doctors may add an antipsychotic drug.

Treating depression with antipsychotic drugs

Antipsychotics are drugs that are usually used to treat schizophrenia. They are also sometimes used with an antidepressant when the antidepressant is not helping enough. This is called “add-on” treatment.

This article tells you about the risks and costs of using antipsychotic drugs as add-ons to treat depression.



Before trying an antipsychotic, ask your doctor about a higher dose of antidepressant, a different kind, or two kinds together. Antidepressants are usually safer and more effective than antipsychotics.

What should I know before I take an antipsychotic drug?

Antipsychotic drugs can have serious side effects. Many people stop taking them because of the side effects. These can include:

- Blurry vision, sleepiness, or dizziness
- Constipation
- Increased risk of Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and stroke
- Uncontrollable moving or shaking of the lips, tongue, face, arms, legs, or body
- Weight gain

Antipsychotics are expensive. You can pay from several hundred dollars to over \$1,000 each month for antipsychotic drugs. Antidepressants cost much less.

There is little research on how well antipsychotic drugs help people with depression. They may help some people, but not all. No studies have compared them to see which ones work better.

Our advice:

If your depression is not getting better, try other treatments before you try antipsychotics.

- Ask your doctor to make sure you do not have other medical and mental health conditions that can cause depression or make it worse—such as post-traumatic stress or substance abuse.
- Ask about trying a higher dose of antidepressant.
- Ask if you can try another kind of antidepressant or if you can take two kinds together.
- Ask for other treatments, such as talk therapy (psychotherapy).
- If you try an antipsychotic, ask for a referral to a psychiatrist, to help you manage side effects.

Antipsychotic Drugs as Add-Ons to Treat Depression

We do **not** recommend any of the drugs as *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* because studies show that they are not very helpful for treating depression. They can also cost a lot.

Our analysis is based on a scientific review by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. This is a summary of a longer, more detailed report you can find at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org.

Generic Name	Brand Name(s)	More Effective Than a Placebo?*	Average Cost / Month
FDA-Approved for Depression			
The FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration) is the federal agency that studies new medicines and decides if they are safe. When the FDA approves a drug, it also decides the main ways the drug can be used. The drugs listed below have been FDA-approved for use as add-ons to treat depression.			
Aripiprazole	Abilify	Yes	\$636 – \$939
Olanzapine	Zyprexa	No Data	\$423 – \$1,242
	Zyprexa Zydis		\$500 – \$1,441
Quetiapine	Seroquel XR	Yes – for 300 mg	\$182 – \$549
		No – for 150 mg	\$182 – \$549
Olanzapine and fluoxetine	Symbyax (Zyprexa & Prozac)	No	\$402 – \$742

Used Off-Label

The drugs listed below have not been FDA-approved for use as add-ons to treat depression. Off-label use is when a doctor prescribes a drug for an unapproved use. This is legal, but there may be less research to support it.

Asenapine	Saphris	No Data	\$758 – \$761
Clozapine	Clozaril	No Data	\$219 – \$568
	Generic	No Data	\$77 – \$356
Iloperidone	Fanapt	No Data	\$701 – \$749
Paliperidone	Invega	No Data	\$590 – \$881
Quetiapine	Seroquel	Yes	\$272 – \$1,197
Risperidone	Risperdal	Yes	\$186 – \$535
	Generic	Yes	\$68 – \$233
Ziprasidone	Geodon	No	\$575 – \$669

*A placebo is a pill that does not do anything. Scientific studies compare drugs and placebos when they test new drugs.

Prices are based on nationwide retail average prices for October 2011. *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* obtained prices from data provided by Wolters Kluwer Pharma Solutions, which is not involved in our analysis or recommendations.