

Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) can be used as part of a treatment plan for children and adolescents with depression and anxiety disorders. There are six SSRIs available in Canada: **citalopram (Celexa®)**, **escitalopram (Ciprallex®)**, **fluoxetine (Prozac®)**, **fluvoxamine (Luvox®)**, **paroxetine (Paxil®)**, **sertraline (Zoloff®)**. None of the SSRIs has been approved for use in children and adolescents in Canada, but some SSRIs are approved for children and adolescents in the US. When the potential benefits of using an SSRI outweigh the potential risks, doctors may prescribe one of these medications to treat: major depression, depression associated with bipolar disorder, a variety of anxiety disorders, eating disorders, selective mutism and significant premenstrual mood changes. Your doctor may prescribe an SSRI for another reason. If you are unclear why an SSRI is being prescribed, ask your doctor.

SSRIs increase the level of the brain chemical serotonin, which may not be working well in people who are depressed or anxious. The exact way SSRIs improve depression and anxiety symptoms is still not fully known. There is evidence that SSRIs are considerably more effective than a placebo at decreasing symptoms of anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). There is research to show certain SSRIs are effective in children and adolescents with depression. Some studies in childhood depression have found that certain SSRIs are not better at treating the symptoms of depression than a placebo. The addition of *Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)* (for depression) or *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)* to this medication may help increase the potential for benefit.

SSRIs are usually taken once a day. Take the medication at the same time(s) each day with or without food as directed by your doctor. There may be less stomach upset if you take it with food or milk. AVOID taking SSRIs with grapefruit as it may interact with some SSRIs. Try to connect it with something you do every day (like eating breakfast or brushing your teeth) so that you don't forget. Usually, your doctor will start with a low dose of medication which will be slowly increased. Talk with your doctor about the best dosage to take based on how well it helps decrease your symptoms and any side effects you may be experiencing.

This medications need to be taken regularly for 3 to 6 weeks before you begin to feel better. Improvements in sleep, appetite and energy may be seen within the first 2 weeks, while other symptoms may take longer. Full benefits may take 4 to 8 weeks (or longer).

Since these medications take time to work, do not increase, decrease or stop them without discussing it with your doctor first. If you are not feeling better within 6 to 8 weeks, your doctor may recommend you take a different medication. There is a small chance that symptoms may worsen or you may experience increased thoughts of self-harm during the first couple of months of taking this medication. If this happens, **tell your doctor IMMEDIATELY.**

Most people need to take this medication for at least 6 months, but it depends on the symptoms you have, how frequently they occur and how long you have had them. This allows time for your symptoms to stabilize and for you to regain your functioning. After this time, talk with your doctor about the benefits and risks to continuing treatment. If you have had several episodes of severe depressive or anxiety symptoms, you may be asked to take this medication for an indefinite amount of time. By continuing to take this medication, you significantly decrease the chance that you may have another episode of depression or anxiety. **Do NOT stop taking this medication (even if you are feeling better) without discussing it with your doctor first. If you stop taking this medication suddenly, it is possible your symptoms may return or you may have a bad reaction.**

SSRIs are not addictive. If you and your doctor decide it is best to stop taking this medication, your doctor will explain how to safely lower the dose so you won't feel any unpleasant "flu-like" effects (chills, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, tingling in hands and feet, muscle aches, fever and electrical sensations) as your body adjusts to being without this medication. Most side effects are mild and temporary. Side effects may occur before any of the beneficial effects. Some people may experience side effects that they feel are serious or long lasting. If you feel this has happened, talk with your doctor right away. Other medications can interact with SSRIs, so check with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist before starting a new medication, or if you develop a new medical problem while you are taking this medication. Keep this medication in the original container stored at room temperature away from moisture and heat (e.g., not in the bathroom or kitchen).

If you experience temporary side effects of feeling drowsy, dizzy or slowed down, avoid operating heavy machinery or driving a car. SSRIs may increase the effects of alcohol, causing more sedation or dizziness. Tell your doctor if you miss a period, become pregnant, are trying to get pregnant or breast-feeding.

If any of these mild side effects are troublesome for you, please discuss them with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| -Diarrhea | -Headache | -Unusually vivid dreams |
| -Difficulty sleeping | -Loss of appetite | -Changes in sexual performance or interest (adolescents/adults) |
| -Drowsiness/fatigue | -Periods of physical restlessness | |
| -Mild energized/agitated feelings | -Stomach aches and nausea | |

Uncommon mild side effects

- | | | |
|---------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| -Constipation | -Motor tics or muscle twitches | -Apathy/Lack of motivation |
| -Dizziness | -Muscle stiffness | -Decreased growth rate |
| -Dry mouth | -Tingling in the hands or feet | |

Contact your doctor IMMEDIATELY if you have any of these uncommon, potentially serious side effects

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| -Uncomfortable sense of restlessness or agitation | -Unusual bruising or bleeding | -Unusual sensations or experiences (e.g. hallucinations) |
| -Skin rash or itchy skin | -Switch in mood to excitement, irritability or happiness | -Thoughts of self harm, hostility or suicide |
| -Energized or agitated feelings | | |