

“I appreciate everything you've done for me,” Frank told his doctor. “My wife thinks the happy pill you've put me on has helped things at home. I'm not that sure it's really done anything good but I don't think it hurts me either. But I take so many pills. I just don't want to be on an antidepressant anymore. What do I need to do to come off?”

Dr. Gregory responded, “I understand your frustration with taking all those medications. It's not the first time you've mentioned it. Of course, it is your decision but I don't think stopping the antidepressant because you take a lot of medicines is a good reason. It's a different story if it's not helping or you want to see how you would do off of it. Are you experiencing side effects or other problems from the medicine?”

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Now that I have reviewed the right reasons, let's examine fifteen of the more common wrong reasons for stopping your antidepressant. A wrong reason may be a legitimate concern for you but there could be better ways to address the issue rather than stopping the medicine and risking a depression recurrence. You may be continuing to have some of the same concerns you had when first starting antidepressants. Others concerns may have developed over time on the medication.

Wrong Reason 1: The medicine isn't helping me (when it really is).

If you still experience some depressive symptoms, you may not believe the medicine is helping, even though you are better. Some people experience mood changes under severe stress, such as problems at work or school, a recent loss, or trauma and expect the medicine to prevent them from feeling poorly. Remember that the medicine is not intended to blunt your emotions, and, if something difficult happens in your life, you should still react emotionally to it despite taking an antidepressant.

Others may not want to accept that they need medicine, so they deny to themselves and others that they have benefited from it. Or, they have done well for a while and forget how their depression affected them before taking antidepressants. Some people will stop taking the antidepressant, believing that they are no better with it, and then are surprised when the depression returns, and they quickly “remember” how badly they felt before taking the medicine.

If your medicine truly is not working as it should, or has stopped being effective, you should talk with your doctor about adjusting the dose, augmenting, or switching medication as reviewed in Chapters Six and Ten. Sometimes, when depression returns while you're still on an antidepressant, you can become pessimistic about treatment altogether and give up hope of improvement with any medication. Depression itself can influence your judgment and optimism about medicine. This is all the more reason to trust your healthcare practitioner's suggestions and reassess your current medicine treatment. Stopping medicine completely in this situation will most likely only make you feel worse.

Wrong Reason 2: The medicine is giving me too many side effects.

Side effects may be a good reason to adjust or switch your medication, but they're not necessarily a reason to stop taking antidepressants altogether. There are exceptions in a small subset of people who simply do not seem to be able to tolerate any antidepressant. With so many new options available today (both medication and non-medication) to treat depression, there may be other types of medicine or therapies that could help. Often, non-antidepressant medications, such as mood stabilizers or certain anti-anxiety medications can be of benefit. Review Chapters Five and Nine for ways of managing both immediate and long-term side effects and non-medication treatments.

Wrong Reason 3: Getting my medication is a hassle.

Going to see a doctor regularly and getting to a pharmacy for your medicine can be a major inconvenience. However, the inconvenience of going through another depressive episode is much greater. Not only can depression negatively impact your day-to-day functioning but you could also end up going to see doctors more frequently in an attempt to get better. If you take antidepressants, you should be seen routinely by a doctor