

Consumers Can Help Prevent Harmful Medication Incidents

SafeMedicationUse.ca Newsletter

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Tips for Starting Antidepressants Safely

It's important to care for your mental health the same way you care for your physical health. Just like treatments for high blood pressure or diabetes, medications may be needed to treat mental health conditions like anxiety and depression.

These medications are known as antidepressants. They are usually started at a low dose to prevent or reduce side effects. The dose is then increased slowly to the dose the prescriber feels is right for you. It may take a few weeks before you start feeling better.

SafeMedicationUse.ca received a report from a person who was to start their antidepressant by taking half a tablet daily for the first week and a whole tablet daily during the second week. The person misread the label and took a whole tablet daily for the first 4 days, at which point they began to feel jittery. The error was discovered when they called their pharmacist, who provided advice on how to manage their medication doses and side effects.

SafeMedicationUse.ca has the following tips to help consumers safely start an antidepressant:

- Before you leave the appointment with your prescriber:
 - Know your prescribed dose and understand the medication plan to increase the dose.
 - Ask what to do if you experience side effects.
 - Find out when you should see the prescriber again for follow-up.
- When you are talking with your pharmacist:
 - Ask about suggestions (e.g., using a calendar) to help you follow your medication plan.
 - Learn about the common side effects. Find out which ones should go away as you get used to the medication and which will require medical attention if they occur.
- Share your plan with a trusted friend or family member.
- If you want to stop your antidepressant, talk to your prescriber. Stopping the medication suddenly can make your anxiety or depression get worse or cause unwanted side effects. See [Stopping Antidepressants Safely](#) for more details.



Medication safety bulletins contribute to Global Patient Safety Alerts.

This newsletter was developed in collaboration with Best Medicines Coalition and Patients for Patient Safety Canada.

Recommendations are shared with healthcare providers, through the ISMP Canada Safety Bulletin, so that changes can be made together.

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