



SSRIs FOR DEPRESSION

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

All of us feel blue, moody, or sad sometimes. Family conflicts, loss of a loved one, health problems and unemployment are examples of **challenging** situations in life that can leave us feeling down.¹ For many people, these feelings pass with time. But if you have feelings of sadness or hopelessness that do not go away and they are affecting how you think, feel, and act, you could be dealing with a medical condition called **depression**.

The acronym “**SAD CAGES**” can help you identify symptoms of depression in order to seek medical advice if needed.² Depression does not feel or look the same for everyone, but you may have depression if you have **five or more** of these symptoms **every day** for **two weeks or longer**:



- S** Sleep disturbances
- A** Appetite changes
- D** Depressed mood or feelings of sadness over a sustained period of time
- C** Concentration difficulties
- A** Anhedonia – loss of interest in enjoyable activities
- G** Guilt or shame
- E** Energy and enthusiasm is low
- S** Suicidal thoughts due to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness

You are not alone



Depression is the **most common** mental health condition in Singapore, affecting at least **1 in 16** adults in their lifetimes.³

HOW IS DEPRESSION TREATED?

There are many things you can do in your daily life to lift your mood including⁴:

- being active
- eating healthy foods
- getting enough sleep
- cutting back on alcohol
- finding time to do things you enjoy

For some people, doing one or some of these things will be enough to help. Other people may also need psychological treatment or medicines (antidepressants). Brain stimulation with electromagnetic currents, such as electroconvulsive therapy and repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation, may also be considered for people with severe depression.

Depression can be treated, especially if you seek help early. Tell your doctor how you feel, the possible reasons for your depression and your mental health history. Your doctor will also discuss your treatment goals and options with you.



What are psychological treatments?

Psychological treatments can help change the way you think about and react to situations and relationships.

Treatments include:

- talking face to face with a health professional
- talking over the phone (telehealth) with a health professional, or
- completing an online program or session.⁵



What are antidepressants?

Antidepressants are a type of medicine that help improve symptoms, mood, emotion, and sleep.

The different types of antidepressants include:

- selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)
- serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs)
- tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs)
- other antidepressants

Because depression is different for everyone, antidepressants are prescribed according to each person's symptoms, needs and preferences.



SELECTIVE SEROTONIN REUPTAKE INHIBITORS (SSRIs)

SSRIs are **commonly used** to treat depression and are generally safe with few side effects. Escitalopram, fluoxetine, fluvoxamine maleate, paroxetine and sertraline are SSRIs approved to treat depression in Singapore.

Most people have **mild side effects** when starting an SSRI including diarrhoea, dry mouth, fatigue, nausea, nervousness, and weight changes. Side effects generally lessen over time as your body gets used to the medicine.

You will usually need to take an SSRI for **2 to 6 weeks** before you start to feel an improvement. Some people may need to take them for 6 to 12 months, or even longer after they feel better, to **prevent symptoms** of depression from coming back.

THINGS TO NOTE






- It is not uncommon for people with depression to have thoughts of suicide and self-harm. Treating depression can reduce the likelihood of suicidal thinking and behaviour.
- During the first few weeks of starting an SSRI, studies have shown that people younger than 25 years may have a higher risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviour.⁶ It is unclear whether the risk is due to SSRIs or depression.
- If you or someone you know has suicidal thoughts when taking SSRIs, **seek medical advice as soon as possible**. Remember that SSRIs are more likely to prevent suicide in the long-term by reducing your depression symptoms and improving your mood.
- If you need a listening ear or someone to talk to, you can call the Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) hotline at **1-767**. Other mental health resources accessible online, over the phone or face-to-face are available [here](#).⁵

SUBSIDISED SSRIs ARE AVAILABLE

Treatment costs are subsidised by **50% to 75%** for eligible patients

SUBSIDISED

-  Fluoxetine  Fluvoxamine maleate  Sertraline

Fluoxetine, fluvoxamine maleate and sertraline are safe and effective SSRIs for treating depression.



FINDING THE RIGHT TREATMENT

The treatment that you need to help manage your depression will depend on various factors such as your age, preferences, symptoms, side effects, medical history, other medicines that you are taking, and what has worked for you or your family members.

It takes time and patience to find the right treatment. Talk to your doctor to discuss which treatment is suitable for you. You can also reach out to a **medical social worker** if you need financial assistance.

Sources

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