

SSRI's (Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors)

SSRI's are a group of anti-depressants that revolutionized the medical treatment of depression and sadness. Listening to Prozac is a classic book that exudes the excitement of this new treatment by those afflicted with a depressive disorder. The medical community was thrilled to have a more natural way to help moods.



In depression one feature of the brain is that it fails to “listen” to happy chemicals (like serotonin... think of the “runner’s high” chemical). For instance: a warm fuzzy in your brain from a happy activity like a nice compliment at work, a warm embrace, a promotion... instead of giving you a normal good feeling that might last most of the day ... in depression: it lasts only a few minutes, then you feel grouchy again.

The consequence of this is not just on your mood. Because your brain feels no better behaving well (and getting warm fuzzies) versus behaving poorly... you lose some of the subtle (unconscious and conscious) emotional direction that your brain needs to guide you onto a happy path. So you also start to make choices that are not healthy. You just don't feel the difference.

SSRI's restore the warm fuzzy to its rightful place in your brain. SSRI's grease the power lines in your brain, but don't drug you. If you have a crummy day, the SSRI won't help much. (Unless someone sends you a rose!) You still need to make the happy chemical. If you can get an exercise “high” you might now feel good all afternoon. So exercise is a big help. Or do something nice to someone and your brain will feel the joy of it!

After several months of such medication you might have trained yourself into a good mood without the SSRI. That is our goal. But don't feel bad if you are one of those that really needs it long term. There is no sin in that. Some brains are just a little low in the serotonin and need continuing help. Unfortunately there is no blood test to see if you are low in serotonin. It's just trial and error at this point.

Many different SSRI's are available. Usually we start with the least expensive and move up to the others if there are unwanted side effects. Just a quick comment on either sexual side effects or weight gain.

Many of us use our sexuality as either an escape or a mood alterer (like a drug). When our relationship with our brain is changed, all our relationships are changed. We may not need sex to boost our mood or to escape as much now. So now we sense the need for intimacy mostly when we feel safe, secure and loved. Now we see how rarely we feel that. Truly your body will still want the healthier sexual expression but not as much the less healthy. Don't blame the drug; rather, work on your relationship to restore a healthier desire for your spouse.

Similarly we have relationships with food that are not just for nourishment. Look at what role food has in your life. If you eat to comfort, to console or to relax, you need to find other activities that will accomplish the same thing. It's not the drug's fault. This drug has NOTHING to do with your metabolism. You just see food differently, and feel unable to control it. Maybe for a while you don't want to, you want to enjoy the higher high in eating!! Well, so be it. But honest, you can control it when you are ready.

Finally, suicide. If you feel like hurting yourself, call us right away. SSRI's get a bum rap for an increase in suicide when someone gets their energy back but hasn't “straightened” their life out yet. If you need it, we will be happy to admit you to the hospital. Such feelings will go away within a short time. Better times are coming soon. Fortunately these drugs can help immensely. A talking professionally (psychologist, psychiatrist or counselor) can be a great help in making necessary changes in your life. You usually don't need a referral from us for that, but do check on how much coverage you have for that, it differs from plan to plan.

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